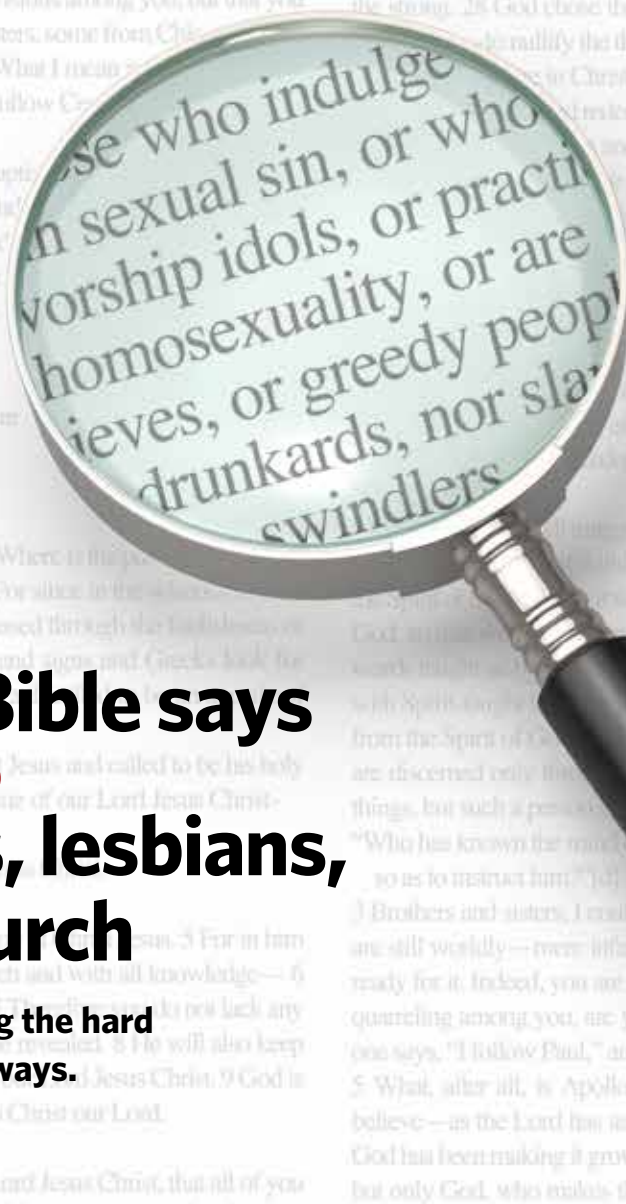


sojourners

January 2015 | sojo.net

Faith in Action for Social Justice



What the Bible says (and doesn't say) about gays, lesbians, and the church

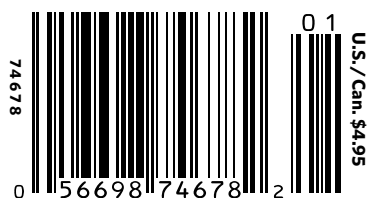
Evangelicals are tackling the hard
questions in fresh new ways.

by DAVID P. GUSHEE

PLUS:

Margaret Atwood on the beatitudes • 100 years of Thomas Merton

Bill McKibben on divesting from fossil fuels • Walmart's hypocrisy



LOVING OTHERS THROUGH EQUAL EDUCATION



JOIN THE MOVEMENT
memphistr.org

Train and live in community with other men and women who are responding to the gospel mandate to love our neighbors as ourselves by providing students in low-income neighborhoods with the same, or better, quality of education as is available to any student in Memphis.

The vision of MTR is to use our specific work within education, in partnership with other holistic organizations, to help restore communities so that all individuals can become empowered contributors to our city, and people of all races and classes can engage with one another in peace.

12-MONTH TEACHER RESIDENCY PROVIDES

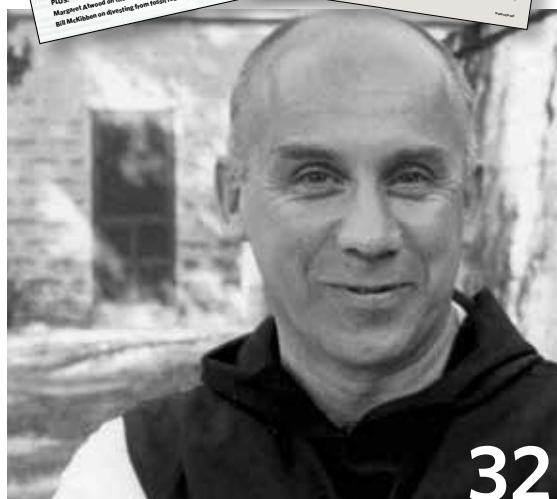
Masters in Urban Education
from Union University
(incl. tuition & books)

**Intensive Classroom
Experience**

**State Of Tennessee
Educator License**

Housing & Monthly Stipend

Staffing & Coaching



contents

JANUARY 2015 Vol. 44 | No. 1

COVER

16 Tackling the Hard Questions

A new look at what scripture teaches Bible-believing Christians about gays, lesbians, and the church.

by David P. Gushee

22 Disputable Matters

Five books that are changing the evangelical LGBT discussion.

by David P. Gushee

FEATURES

26 What About the Meek?

Do you have to let bullies kick sand in your face?

by Margaret Atwood

28 Bear Mountain

Five boys and one quiet honest wry excellent priest.

by Brian Doyle

32 The Public Private Life of Thomas Merton

The "restless monk" speaks to a new generation.

by Christopher Pramuk

36 Grace-Filled Moments

Keeping vigil in the wake of Indianapolis gun violence.

by Dawn Cherie Araujo

CULTURE WATCH

40 Books by and about Thomas Merton

Reviews: *Black Prophetic Fire*; *With a Little Help from Our Friends*; *Contested Land, Contested Memory*

42 Eyes & Ears, by Danny Duncan Collum

43 On Film, by Gareth Higgins

COMMENTARY

8 Iraqi Christians

9 Walmart hypocrisy

10 Nuclear spring

DEPARTMENTS

5 Letters

25 Poetry

47 Short Takes

48 Living the Word

by Reta Halteman Finger

COLUMNS

7 Hearts & Minds

by Jim Wallis

12 Moving Mountains

by Lisa Sharon Harper

14 Deep Economy

by Bill McKibben

50 H'rumpths

by Ed Spivey Jr.



Master of Social Work

Department of Social Work ■ BSW and MSW Programs

Justice • Compassion • Action

Azusa Pacific University's Master of Social Work program prepares you for a career dedicated to improving the lives of others in a variety of professional settings, locally and around the world.

- Full-time and part-time options
- Internships in the Greater Los Angeles area
- Integration of faith and social work practice
- Two specialized concentrations

Community Practice and Partnerships Concentration // Study international social work, global relief and development, community advocacy, organizational leadership, grant writing, and more.

Clinical Practice with Individuals and Families Concentration // Focus on clinical practice in hospitals, schools, mental health care, child welfare agencies, older adult services, shelters, group homes, corrections, and more.

Apply today!

Visit us at apu.edu/msw/,
email kmaynard@apu.edu,
or call (626) 857-2400.



IN RECENT DECADES, questions around sexuality—and in particular around people with same-sex attractions—have been among the most divisive issues for the church. Congregations, conferences, and denominations (and families!) have been pulled apart by differences of interpretation, belief, and practice among Christians and church bodies. Gay Christians have borne the destructive and sometimes violent brunt of these differences.

Many who hold different views on these matters share a deep commitment to the Bible but differ in how to read and understand what the Bible says or means. Those who consider themselves as having a “high” view of scripture have tended to understand the Bible as clearly condemning all homosexual acts. They see those who have come to different biblical conclusions as having a

“lower” view of scripture.

The supposedly well-defined lines that delineated that dichotomy have become blurred in recent years. Evangelical scholars—with an unequivocal commitment to biblical authority—are beginning to question the traditionalists’ interpretations of the Word on these matters. Well-regarded and deeply respected evangelical scholars are finding evidence in their read of scripture that the few relevant biblical passages have very little, if anything, to do with contemporary same-sex covenant relationships based on mutuality, love, respect, and fidelity.

David P. Gushee is one of those highly esteemed evangelical scholars. In his new book, *Changing Our Mind*, the basis of this month’s cover article, Gushee carefully examines all of the pertinent biblical passages and

concludes that the church would be well served to revisit its traditional interpretation with fresh eyes and open hearts, enabling us to have a civil, charitable, respectful, and prayerful discourse on these controversial and complicated issues.

Not surprising, when the church has been called to re-examine such intensely held beliefs, deeply rooted in our psyches and our cultural values, a backlash often occurs, directed at those who argue for new ways of seeing and understanding, often filled with bitterness, hostility, and rancor. But Jesus’ model of sacrificial love instead invites us to reach across our divides with humility and grace, to truly listen well to those with whom we disagree, and to seek to discern together how God calls us today and every day to be salt and light to the world around us. ■

Letters

INTERFAITH BRIDGE BUILDING

I want to applaud the golden words of Jonathan Kuttub in his “Principles for Prophetic Action in the Middle East” (November 2014). As Christians, we have enormous, untapped resources to immediately undertake many of the practices he mentioned, “building bridges and seeking reconciliation.”

In Canada, we are using a project called Homeless Partners. The organization’s website, homelesspartners.com, lists the personal stories and Christmas wish lists of people who are homeless. Homeless Partners enables members of the community to pledge a gift and deliver it directly to the homeless shelter with a personal caring message. This year, instead of sending only Christians into the shelters to interview the homeless about their stories and wish lists, we paired up—both Christians and Muslims—to do the interviews together. We are working together to help the poor.

Helping the poor is one of the principles that all religions have in common. What better way to bring glory to God, to love our neighbor as ourselves, and to break through the great divide? We welcome any organization to join us.

Jennie Keeran

Victoria, British Columbia

FORGIVE US

The book *Forgive Us*, excerpted in “Full Body Repentance” (November 2014), is the most significant collection of writings from the Christian community I’ve seen in ... how long? Ever? I pray it will become the movement of this time—a new, old,

“My lunch is sitting there like an accusation.”

and redemptive mindset and soul-set! I’ve been on this wounded Earth twice as long as most of you, and the ache inside my heart for these principles to be openly, powerfully manifested was never assuaged until reading from this book.

Judith Dupree

Pine Valley, California

YOU ARE WHAT YOU EAT

Although it’s beside the main point of his column, one sentence of Ed Spivey Jr.’s “The Party of Pink” (September-October 2014) jumped out at me. In reference to the intolerance of some Americans for undocumented workers, he says, “People are entitled to their opinions, even if the food on their plates sits in mute repudiation of those beliefs.”

A few days earlier I had been visiting an elderly woman with dementia, and her first words to me were, “My lunch is sitting there like an accusation.” She was referring to the spills on her clothing. However, when I read Spivey’s comment, I appropriated both his statement and the elderly woman’s comment

as a challenge to how I look at the food on my plate. Does the way I buy and consume food reflect and support my core beliefs, or is my lunch an accusation? Most levels of American society have become so privileged that it is easy to be complacent about where our food comes from and ignore the human costs of easily accessible food. If we do all things, including eating and drinking, to the glory of God, we must be mindful about who is providing our food and what their struggles are.

Linda Tshimika

Fresno, California

Kudos! (or Brickbats!) Write to letters@sojo.net or Letters, Sojourners, 3333 14th St. NW, Suite 200, Washington, DC 20010. Include your name, city, and state. Letters may be edited.

sojourners

President/Editor-in-Chief, Jim Wallis
Chief Executive Officer, Robert Wilson-Black
Vice President and Chief Financial Officer, Michael Norman
Vice President, Human Resources, Karen L. Lattea

Editor, Jim Rice
Art Director, Ed Spivey Jr.
Senior Associate Editors, Rose Marie Berger, Julie Polter
Associate Editor, Elizabeth Palmberg (1970-2014)
Assistant Editor, Elaina Ramsey

Senior Director of Circulation and Production, Cynthia J. Martens
Director of Advertising Sales, Sandra Sims
Director of Integrated Branding and Production, Sondra Haaga
Advertising Sales Associate, Katie Zimmerman

Chief Advancement Officer, Larisa Friesen Hall
Senior Director of Foundation Relations and Performance Officer, Lisa Daughtry-Weiss
Director of Individual Giving, Katie Chatelaine-Samsen
Director of Major Gifts, Kaitlin Hasseler
Donor Services Manager, Erika Jackson-Stokes
Manager of Planned Giving and Research, Brandon Baird

Web Editor and Chief Digital Officer, Sandi Villarreal
Director of Web and Digital Technology, Bob Sabath
Associate Web Editor, Catherine Woodiwiss

Chief Strategy Officer, Tim King
Senior Director of Mobilizing, Lisa Sharon Harper
Senior Director of Advocacy, Beau Underwood
Press Secretary, Juliet Vedral
Immigration Campaign Associate, Ivone Guillen
Creation Care Campaign Associate, Liz Schmitt
Online Organizing Associate, Janelle Tupper

Accountant, Brion Thomas
Intern Program Director, Elizabeth Denlinger Reaves
Senior Executive Assistant, George Lee
Office Manager, Simon Oh
Assistant to the President, J.K. Granberg-Michaelson

Interns: Jenna Barnett, *Editorial*; Rachel Buller, *Circulation and Resources*; Ariana DeNardo, *Donor Services*; Ted English, *Executive*; Charissa Laisy, *Mobilizing*; Kaeley McEvoy, *Campaigns*; Abigail Olcese, *Advertising*; Lani Prunés, *Editorial*; Ryan Stewart, *Online*; Greg Williams, *Communications*

Contributing Editors: Diana Butler Bass, Daniel Berrigan, Melvin Bray, Walter Brueggemann, Majora Carter, Joan Chittister, Eugene Cho, Shane Claiborne, Danny Duncan Collum, Edwidge Danticat, Marie Dennis, John Dilulio, E.J. Dionne Jr., Valerie Elverton Dixon, Reta Halteman Finger, Wes Granberg-Michaelson, David P. Gushee, Adam Hamilton, Vincent Harding (1931-2014), Obery Hendricks, Gareth Higgins, Joel Hunter, Lynne Hybels, Daisy Khan, Anne Lamott, Bill McKibben, Brian McLaren, Donald Miller, Ched Myers, Eboo Patel, John Perkins, Samuel Rodriguez, Richard Rohr, Ron Sider, Barbara Brown Taylor, Cornel West, Lauren Winner, Valerie Weaver-Zercher, Tyler Wigg Stevenson, Bill Wylie-Kellermann

Contributing Writers: Onleilove Alston, Frida Berrigan, Michaela Bruzzese, Kimberly Burge, Judy Cooode, David Cortright, Aaron McCarroll Gallegos, Bob Hulteen, Jesse Nathan, Brittany Shoot, Glen Stassen (1936-2014), Kari Jo Verhulst, Andrew Wilkes, Jonathan Wilson-Hartgrove, Tobias Winright

Sojourners magazine (ISSN 0364-2097) is published monthly, except September-October is combined, at 3333 14th St. NW, Suite 200, Washington, DC 20010. Periodicals Postage Paid at Washington, D.C., and additional mailing offices. Canadian Publications Sales Agreement #257494. POSTMASTER: Send address changes to Sojourners, PO Box 48, Congers, NY 10920-9856.

Sojourners Online: www.sojournal.net • @sojourners
 Get free email updates at sojo.net/email_subscription.



The **NEW** Anabaptist

- Seeking mind of Christ
- Looking for authentic community
- Working for peace
- Loves Jesus
- Farm tool for simple living (former sword)
- Willing to give up coat for economic justice
- Cares about water (baptism) but also the earth

You are invited to a learning forum on ministry with young adults.
Anabaptism, the Next Generation. April 17-19, 2015.



BETHANY
 Theological Seminary

www.bethanyseminary.edu/YAForum2015

Come and **join the conversation**



EASTERN UNIVERSITY

PhD in Organizational Leadership

Business • Education • Nonprofit

APPLY NOW!
 Fall 2015 Cohort
www.eastern.edu/phd

**WAKE UP
 THE WORLD**
 EASTERN UNIVERSITY



BY JIM WALLIS

Orthodoxy and Orthopraxy



ORTHODOXY AND orthopraxy—strange theological words from Sojourners’ past. But I was recently thinking back to the theology with which Sojourners began—43 years ago—and how it is still so central and fundamental to me today.

I remember the word that we so often used back in our formative days: “and.” As young Christians, we said our fledgling little movement was committed to evangelism *and* social justice, prayer *and* peace-making, spirituality *and* politics, personal *and* public transformation, contemplation *and* activism, real salvation *and* real social change, orthodoxy *and* orthopraxy—which means starting with a biblical and Christ-centered personal faith and then living and practicing that faith

the proclamation and practice of a caricature of Christianity so enculturated, domesticated, and lifeless that our generation easily and naturally rejects it as ethically insensitive, hypocritical, and irrelevant to the needs of our times.

We fault a narrow orthodoxy that speaks of salvation but is often disobedient to the teaching of the prophets, the apostles, and Christ himself, who clearly stated that faith divorced from a radical commitment to social justice is a mockery. Salvation spiritually manifests itself in active concern for the needs and rights of people. We fault also a naïve and inadequate liberal theology that neglects man’s need of personal transformation and liberation, perverts the historic content of the Christian faith, and reduces Jesus Christ to a Galilean boy scout. ... A faith rooted in biblical data must stress both personal liberation and dynamic commitment to social justice that contains the seeds of social liberation.

Our mission was, is, and always will be centered in Jesus Christ.

in the world—in ways that changed both our own lives and public life. “And” was our big word in a church that was so divided and polarized. Another way we expressed it was calling for a “third way” beyond conservative and liberal, evangelical and mainline.

I want to refer back to some of the earliest expressions of our critique of both the conservative and liberal theologies of the time. Please forgive some of the passionate and movement language from the later 1960s and early ’70s (and the generic “male” language), but this was written when I was 23, in 1971! Yet the heart of the editorial commitment expressed so long ago remains true of Sojourners today:

We contend that the new vision that is necessary is to be found in radical Christian faith that is grounded in commitment to Jesus Christ. ... The offense of established religion is

STILL TODAY WE see some churches that view “the gospel” as private atonement and only see social “implications,” while others reduce Christianity to following the teachings of Jesus as best one can, without the need for a personal relationship with Christ.

We believe, however, that to experience personal transformation through Jesus Christ and then live out the kingdom of God as a new order that Christ came to bring “on Earth as it is in heaven” is still the foundation of what we called “radical Christianity.”

The good news is that many evangelical churches are now preaching the gospel as “good news to the poor,” as did Jesus’ first sermon at Nazareth. At the same time, more mainline churches are coming back to personal faith in Jesus as well as emphasizing his teachings.

And we now have a pope who is calling Catholics, and all of us, back to personal conversion and obedience to Christ in ways that change the world, especially for the poor and vulnerable—“the least of these” whom Jesus describes in Matthew 25 as the test of our faith.

Sojourners’ mission is “to articulate the biblical call to social justice, inspiring hope and building a movement to transform individuals, communities, the church, and the world.” That’s a commitment you see in every issue of *Sojourners*, including this one. Our mission was, is, and always will be centered in Jesus Christ as our Savior and Lord.

The changes in the world we hope and pray for will never come from politics. My editorial in the first issue of the magazine under the *Sojourners* name (we changed our original name, *The Post-American*, to *Sojourners* in 1976), put it this way:

I have no confidence that the vision and power for new human values and relationships can be generated from the present system or from its ideological opponents. Christians have that responsibility. Social leadership in providing alternative vision and values is a Christian responsibility because the necessary breaks with the mindset of the present system require deep and thorough-going transformation and life redirection, which is at the heart of the power of Christ in the world. Fundamental change of this proportion is basic to the claim of the gospel and its outworking in the context of a body of believers committed to Christ and to one another.

Orthodoxy and orthopraxy. Pray that we will continue to be faithful to our mission. ■

Jim Wallis is editor-in-chief of Sojourners magazine.



Jeju Justice

Catholic priest Mun Jeong-hyeon, founder of Catholic Priests' Association for Justice in South Korea, was arrested in Gangjeong on Jeju Island on Sept. 15, 2014, outside an unfinished U.S.-South Korea naval base considered a linchpin in President Obama's "pivot to Asia" strategy. Since 2007, thousands of demonstrators, including hundreds of Catholic priests and nuns, have been arrested while celebrating Mass and blocking the base entrance. Jeju is strategically located in fuel-shipping lanes between Russia, China, Taiwan, South Korea, and Japan. Sixty percent of the U.S. Air Force and Navy are slated for the Asia-Pacific region by 2020.

By Beau Underwood

Collateral Damage

Does Christianity have a future in Iraq?

THE U.S. AND other nations are increasingly aware that the so-called Islamic State is a serious, long-term threat to Middle East stability. And it has become clear that there are few good options for addressing the situation without the willingness and ability of the Iraqi government to promote inclusion and weed out corruption.

In the midst of all this, the plight of Iraqi Christians has taken center stage. Since the U.S.-led invasion of Iraq in 2003, more than two-thirds of the Iraqi Christian community has left the country, with many fleeing as a result of violence and religious persecution.

This exodus has only increased as the reach of the Islamic State, or ISIS, has expanded and its reputation for brutality become widely known. The militant group has publicly beheaded hostages for propaganda purposes, committed mass killings, and given Christians the ultimatum: Convert to Islam, pay a fine, or face death if they remain faithful to their beliefs.

Followers of Christ have existed in the area now called Iraq since the earliest days of Christianity. Now there is a serious debate as to whether the faith has a viable future in this ancient of lands.

Writing in *The Washington Post* in September, Daniel Williams asserted that "Christianity in Iraq is finished." He based this claim on conversations with Iraqi

Martin Accad, an Arab Christian and professor at Arab Baptist Theological Seminary, recently offered a different perspective. He perceives the conflict as fundamentally between two types of people: 1) those from a variety of faith traditions who are motivated to seek human flourishing, guided by their beliefs to love their neighbor and to promote peace, and 2) reli-

Followers of Christ have been here since the earliest days of the church.

Christian refugees who had given up hope of living peacefully in their homeland after years of persecution and torment. The rise of ISIS was the proverbial straw that broke the camel's back, but the fear and frustration have been building for more than a decade. According to Williams the only reasonable option is to facilitate the safe removal of the remaining Christians from Iraq.

gious extremists who are using violence to enforce their narrow ideology on others. Accad called for the global community to focus less on what is happening to Christians as a specific group and more on the general threat facing Christians, Muslims, and Jews united in their opposition to ISIS. He advocated that Western nations spend less money arming various groups in the region

Our Mission

The mission of *Sojourners* magazine is to inspire hope and action by articulating the biblical call to racial and social justice, life and peace, and environmental stewardship.

Business and Editorial Address

Please send all business and editorial correspondence to Sojourners, 3333 14th Street NW, Suite 200, Washington, DC 20010.

Subscription and Change of Address

SUBSCRIBERS: Visit sojo.net/subscribe to manage your subscription or print change of address on a card with old address label attached; send all subscription correspondence and address changes (except countries listed below) to Sojourners, PO Box 48, Congers, NY 10920-9856, call 1-800-678-9691, or email us at sojourners@cambeywest.com (allow six weeks to process any address change).
POSTMASTER: Send address changes to Sojourners, PO Box 48, Congers, NY 10920-9856.

Subscription Rates

U.S.: \$39.95 one year print (for first-class mail, \$50). Digital subscriptions to *Sojourners* are available for \$19.95 (free to print subscribers) at sojo.net/subscribe. **Australia:** \$78 one year (via air mail, paid in Australian currency, and sent to MediaCom, PO Box 610, Unley 5061 SA). **New Zealand:** \$97 one year (via air mail, paid in New Zealand currency, and sent to MediaCom, PO Box 9483, Wellington, NZ); email admin@mediacom.org.au. **All other foreign surface** (six to eight weeks delivery overseas): \$49.95 one year. **All other air service overseas** (one to two weeks delivery): \$59.95 one year. Except where noted, payable in U.S. currency.

Newsstand Circulation

Newsstand circulation through Distictor Magazine Distribution Services. For more information, call (905) 619-6565, fax (905) 619-2903, or email mraucci@distictor.com.

Advertising

Advertisement in *Sojourners* does not imply editorial endorsement. For information on display advertising in *Sojourners*, please write to: Advertising, Sojourners, 3333 14th Street NW, Suite 200, Washington, DC 20010; advertising@sojo.net; or visit www.sojournal.net.

Submissions

Please direct poetry to the Poetry Editor (postal mail only, address below) and books, music, and reviews to the Review Editor by post or at reviews@sojo.net. No submissions will be returned.

Full writer's guidelines: sojo.net/writers.

Printed in the U.S.A. on recycled paper.



All content copyright ©2015 Sojourners
3333 14th Street NW, Suite 200
Washington, DC 20010
Phone (202) 328-8842

and instead invest in expanding educational opportunities, building robust governmental and civil institutions, and prioritizing community development. This is the long-term path that leads to a peaceful pluralism. Accad argued that religions that promote peace, and Christianity specifically, are "at the heart of the Middle East's future."

At this stage it is impossible to know whether Williams or Accad is more accurate in his analysis. But the plight of our sisters and brothers in the Iraqi church is something Christians throughout the rest of the world cannot ignore. Their terror and suffering are acute and should affect every believer who claims to be a disciple of Christ, for it is

By Rachel Marie Stone

'Tis the Season

Some Walmart practices show gross disregard for the well-being of workers.

THE CONSIDERABLE gap between Walmart's declared corporate values and the way it actually conducts business widens even more during the holiday season.

This season, shoppers frequenting the world's largest retailer are encouraged to select the name of a child and to purchase and donate her wished-for gift from one of the "giving trees" located in stores. Throughout the year, the company works hard to give the impression of corporate generosity, giving, for example, to food banks.

However, many of Walmart's own employees (or, as they are referred to in Walmart-speak, "associates") are forced to rely on these same types of programs to get by—such as Christmas gifts for their children (purchased by strangers) and groceries from food banks.

Walmart, the United States' largest employer, employs 1.4 million Americans; that's five times as many as IBM. Walmart manufactures the very problems that it proudly claims to alleviate, which is worse than doing nothing at all. The deception would be laughable were it not tragic. Walmart seeks praise for funding food banks and providing toys for children in need, when they are a big part of the reason people struggle to buy food and gifts in the first place.

"A lot of people I work with can't make ends meet," Linda Haluska, a 53-year-old

exactly because of their beliefs that they are enduring this turmoil, and when one part of the body of Christ suffers then every member shares in the pain (1 Corinthians 12:26).

The history of the Christian church would be drastically different, perhaps even unimaginable, without the life and witness of Christians who have grown and persevered in what is now Iraq. It is disconcerting, though not surprising, that decades of war and violence in Iraq would leave the destruction of that community as collateral damage. ■

Beau Underwood is senior director of advocacy and communications at Sojourners.

mother who has worked at Walmart for nine years, told *Sojourners*. "[Corporate managers] talk about their appreciation for us. Why don't they show that appreciation by paying us fairly?"

For the past three years, Haluska has been a part of Organization United for Respect at Walmart (OUR Walmart). Though the company is notoriously anti-union—Haluska spoke of being forced to view propaganda videos detailing "why union isn't the right choice for Walmart" after corporate learned that a union organizer had been talking to workers at her store—OUR Walmart is gaining members.

OUR Walmart isn't exactly a union, but already it connects thousands of Walmart workers with one another via social media.

Solidarity between workers is a major goal of OUR Walmart. Haluska joined three years ago, when she began noticing the troubling ways in which management strove to "conquer and divide" employees, "pitting them against each other" by, for example, assigning unreasonably large tasks to one shift and then, when the next shift arrives to find an overwhelming backlog of work, blaming the previous shift.

This common tactic, Haluska said, along with the constant threat of firing, kept workers' resentments directed at one another instead of toward management.

From the Archives

January 1981

Why People are Poor

IF A POLL WERE to be taken in North American churches concerning the causes of poverty, the results might be quite revealing. The major cause of poverty is widely assumed to be “underdevelopment.” Other prominent factors are believed to be laziness (we’ve all read about those exemplary ants in Proverbs 6), vices such as drunkenness, and, however subtly and discreetly expressed, the supposed racial and national inferiority of certain peoples. It’s a very comforting worldview, and one that our most popular politicians delight to propagate.

But if you look up “underdevelopment” in a concordance ... you find precisely nothing. The Bible contains a few scattered references attributing certain instances of poverty to laziness, drunkenness, and other assorted causes, but hardly enough to substantiate any of them as the basic cause.

Looking up the words “oppress” and “oppression” in the concordance discloses an overwhelming avalanche of texts, however, representing 15 Hebrew roots and two Greek, occurring more than 300 times. Following through the concordance study with references to standard Hebrew and Greek lexicons uncovers even more references, many of them obscured by the traditional translations.

If the biblical vocabulary for oppression is then correlated with the vocabulary for the poor and poverty, we find that in 122 texts oppression is indicated as the cause of poverty. ■

Tom Hanks, a Presbyterian minister, taught Old Testament at the Seminario Bíblico Latinoamericano in San Jose, Costa Rica, when this article appeared.



Another goal of OUR Walmart is to demand respect from corporate management. “We want to let the Waltons [the owners of Walmart] know that we are people, that we have families, and that our work puts them where they are.”

Some of the practices Haluska described, while not illegal, show evidence of gross disregard for the well-being of workers. One OUR Walmart initiative, Respect the Bump, urges Walmart management to make reasonable accommodations for pregnant workers. Haluska described a pregnant woman with severe swelling being refused simple accommodations that would allow her to keep working, and an older man with arthritis being asked to move entire pallets of merchandise. Additionally, Walmart is cutting health insurance for another 30,000 part-time workers, while raising premiums on the rest.

By Joseph Gerson

No Nukes!

This spring, thousands will gather in New York to say no to nuclear weapons.

IN APRIL, THOUSANDS of people from across the United States and the world, joined by activists and A-bomb survivors from Japan, will flock to New York to demand that the nuclear powers fulfill their nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) obligations to negotiate a legally binding agreement to completely eliminate their nuclear arsenals.

The NPT Review Conference, held at the U.N. every five years, presents an important opportunity for the 189 signatory nations and for civil society to ensure that this treaty is implemented. The treaty rests on three pillars: 1) non-nuclear states forswear becoming nuclear powers; 2) all signatory nations have the right to generate nuclear energy for peaceful purposes (a serious flaw); and 3) the P-5 nations (U.S., Russia, Britain, France, and China) are obligated to engage in good-faith negotiations to completely eliminate their nuclear arsenals.

Forty-five years after the treaty went into effect, the P-5 have yet to fulfill their part of the bargain, leading to a loss of faith by a growing number of nations and the danger that some will opt out of the treaty to equalize the imbalance of nuclear terror. With the

“There is no sympathy for basic human conditions,” Haluska said.

“When you shop at Walmart,” Haluska said, “there is so much more involved than just getting the best deal” in the form of a low retail price. “Customers don’t understand the domino effect of buying just one particular product ... it goes all the way down to how our economy works.”

Gifts mean nothing when they are mere symbolic nods to the obligations one already has; it is not a “gift” to give my children the basic things to which they are entitled. So it is with Walmart. Until each worker is paid a living wage and treated with decency and humane respect, all the “giving tree” drives in the world amount to little more than fancy wrapping on an empty box. ■

Rachel Marie Stone is the author of Eat With Joy: Redeeming God’s Gift of Food.

U.S. and Russia having engaged in nuclear war exercises during the Ukraine crisis, simulated U.S. nuclear attacks against North Korea, the U.S.-Chinese arms race, and India and Pakistan again at loggerheads, April’s review conference provides a critical opportunity to press for nuclear weapons abolition and to build the nuclear disarmament movement.

How great is the danger of nuclear war? Recent studies show that a limited nuclear war—say, between India and Pakistan, which have around 100 weapons each—could kill an estimated 2 billion people from the resulting global famine. The use of significantly more weapons could bring on nuclear winter and the end of life as we know it.

Six years ago, citing calls for nuclear weapons abolition by former Secretaries of State George Shultz and Henry Kissinger, former Secretary of Defense William Perry, Sen. Sam Nunn, and countless generals and admirals, presidential candidate Barack Obama promised—and later pledged in Prague—to work for the elimination of nuclear weapons. Nonetheless, the Pentagon is on track to spend \$750 billion to “modernize” the U.S.

nuclear arsenal and its delivery systems. The other nuclear powers are also modernizing their arsenals. And NATO's expansion and U.S. conventional and high-tech weapons superiority have increased Russia's reliance on nuclear weapons.

These developments frighten and anger most of the world's nations. They rail at the double standard of the nuclear powers insisting that the non-nuclear nations fulfill their NPT obligations while the P-5 countries continue to prepare for nuclear war. At last year's U.N. High Level Meeting on Nuclear Disarmament, one national leader after another joined the Non-Aligned Movement's condemnation of the nuclear powers. There was outrage last February when 146 countries gathered in Mexico for a conference on the Humanitarian Impact of Nuclear Weapons. Drawing on traditional humanitarian law, 155 nations have signed a U.N. statement opposing nuclear weapons.

When the last NPT review was held in 2010, thousands of activists from around the world came to New York and helped to win a meaningful "action plan." We now face the challenge of moving from that yet-to-be-fulfilled plan to ensuring that the NPT review *mandates* the commencement of those negotiations.

U.N. Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon and many diplomats tell us that without popular pressure, they can't rid the world of nuclear weapons. The world's disarmament movements are rising to this challenge. For the April events, an international planning group has been created, involving diverse organizations from the U.S. and around the world. Our call is clear: a time-bound framework for negotiating the total ban and elimination of all nuclear weapons, and the creation of a fair, democratic, ecologically sustainable future.

We look to people of conscience to join our mobilization in New York when we gather in conferences, on the streets, and in the halls of power, together taking a step to rid the world of the threat of nuclear weapons. Join us. ■

Joseph Gerson, director of the Peace and Economic Security Program of the American Friends Service Committee, is co-convenor of the International Planning Group for the 2015 NPT Review Mobilization (visit PeaceAndPlanet.org).

2015 Bowen Conference

ModernVoices

Answering Ancient Calls

February 22-24, 2015

Inspiring actions and remarkable results will be the focus as the Rev. Dan Matthews, former rector of Trinity Wall Street, and the Rt. Rev. Charles Duvall, retired Bishop of the Central Gulf Coast, join forces to present five guest speakers, both clergy and lay, whose congregations are bucking the trend of declining membership and shrinking budgets. Each speaker will share his or her vision for a new and revitalized Episcopal Church, one that flourishes despite controversy and welcomes the broad spectrum of believers.

Learn more at kanuga.org/bowen



KANUGA

Hendersonville, NC

Conferences • Camps • Retreats • Outdoor Education • Family Getaways



“I AM ON AN
ENDLESS QUEST
TO CULTIVATE
COMPASSION
WITH WISDOM,
AND LOVE
WITH TRUTH
AND JUSTICE.”

ANDREA NOEL
current M.A. Student

The new **Faith and Social Justice M.A. track** in Spiritual and Pastoral Care will help students develop the skills necessary for contemporary, justice-oriented ministries including careers in **community organizing, nonprofit management and administration, advocacy, volunteer management and administration, and congregation- and community-based justice work.**

GRADUATE PROGRAMS IN PASTORAL
COUNSELING AND SPIRITUAL CARE



LOYOLA
UNIVERSITY MARYLAND

Preview Week: Feb. 17-19, 2015

LOYOLA.EDU/ANSWERTHECALL
410-617-5020

An Education in Implicit Bias

2014 WAS NOTHING if not the year when implicit bias was exposed in law enforcement, the justice system, and media reporting. As the nation sorted out reporting on the police shooting of 18-year-old Michael Brown in Ferguson, Mo., police treatment of protesters, and the accuracy of the reporting itself, the words “implicit bias” or “unconscious bias” jumped to the fore again and again.

According to the Kirwan Institute report “State of the Science: Implicit Bias Review 2014,” “Implicit bias refers to the attitudes or stereotypes that affect our understanding, actions, and decisions in an unconscious manner.”

My question is this: If 2014 opened the eyes of the general public to the presence of implicit biases embedded in our systems, could 2015 be the year when we begin to take a closer look at the impacts of

“We are not racists, but we accept a system that acts in racist ways.”

implicit bias in our public systems and structures—and the way we talk about them?

For example, take this tit-for-tat about the education system: On Oct. 11, in his third column in a series called “When Whites Just Don’t Get It,” Nick Kristof wrote in *The New York Times*, “Too many whites unquestioningly accept a system that disproportionately punishes blacks and that gives public schools serving disadvantaged children many fewer resources than those serving affluent children. We are not racists, but we accept a system that acts in racist ways.”

On Oct. 23, Norman Leahy and Paul Goldman posted their own op-ed in *The Washington Post* titled, “When ‘whites’ don’t get it—a rebuttal.”



Giorgio Majno

Their direct “rebuttal” didn’t address Kristof’s point at all. Instead, they expressed deep offense that Kristof would paint all whites with the same big brush; they then proceeded to highlight one case of corruption by black legislators in one Southern town. If that’s not painting with a big brush, then what is?

Here is the implicit bias embedded in our education system—the bias Kristof referenced, the bias Leahy and Goldman completely missed: In our education system, schools are funded through local homeownership taxes. If an area has more homeowners, it will have more tax revenue to fund local public schools. The more homes are valued on the market, the more money residents will have for their schools. On the other hand, if there are more renters in an area, then there will be less money for the local schools.

Now consider this: Even after passage of the 1968 Fair Housing Act, housing discrimination happens. Realtors steer black families and other families of color to non-white areas with fewer resources and therefore lower property value. Plus, concentrated impoverished areas tend to have more renters. As a result, their schools

have less money. Hence, many public schools in poor neighborhoods have no books and less-experienced teachers, often provided by an agency such as Teach for America. This is how our system works.

Worse, *The Washington Post* published Leahy and Goldman’s “rebuttal” as if it were a legitimate counterargument. It is one thing for a paper with the heft of the *Post* to engage a genuine dialogue. But the *Post*’s editors allowed a racially defensive and fact-evasive rant to masquerade as a legitimate rebuttal for the record. And, in the process, the paper laid another brick of implicit bias into the structure of our society. For years to come school children, university students, and researchers will look at the *Post*’s “rebuttal” and assume it is at least of equal weight to Kristof’s argument, and that it is legitimate logic—enough to be published in the paper that uncovered Watergate. But it is not. And that is the shame of it. ■



Lisa Sharon Harper is senior director of mobilizing for Sojourners and co-author of *Forgive Us: Confessions of a Compromised Faith* (Zondervan, 2014).



Over 1.2 billion people live
on less than **\$1.25 per day.**

A small gift from you goes a long way for them.

freedomfromhunger.org/savealife



Self-Help for a Hungry World

Light each candle with faith.
Prepare every sermon with joy.

Preaching the Word. Inspiration for every season.

Preaching the Word is a dynamic resource designed by Sojourners to help you in your sermon preparation. PTW will inspire you with thoughtful reflections and give you access to biblical commentary found nowhere else.

*Recognized by the
Associated Church Press
as an award-winning
Bible resource.*

Start your subscription for as low as \$5.53 per month!*

► sojo.net/ptw ◀

*Rate applies to a 3-year subscription.

Preaching *the* Word
Online Sermon Preparation and Scripture Reflections

An End to the Fossil-Fuel Era?

THE MOOD ALONG Central Park West couldn't have been sweeter: As block after block after block of scientists and students and clerics strolled by on the People's Climate March, everyone was smiling. Serious, yes—but calm. Determined, but hopeful. It was a coming out party, and everyone was reassured to see how big and broad this movement actually was.

And everyone was relieved, I think, not to have to listen to speeches. Without politicians explaining what the day was all about, the march was able to speak for itself, with a mix of anger and inspiration exemplified by the front-line communities and Indigenous nations that filled out the first ranks of the procession.

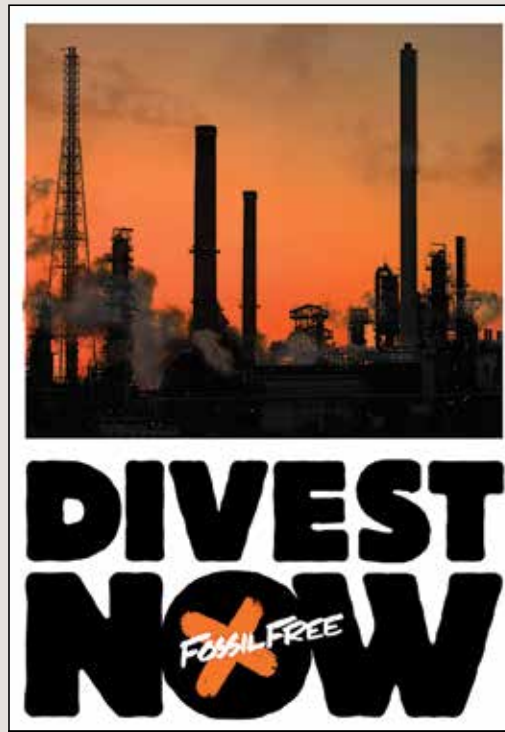
That night, though, there were a couple of speeches worth listening to. They came further up the West Side, at the Cathedral of St. John the Divine, where religious leaders had gathered for a series of meetings and services. At the reception following those talks, Stephen Heintz,

their various charitable trusts would now divest their holdings in fossil-fuel companies, arguing that it was both financially imprudent and immoral to continue trying to make money off the planet's destruction.

The Rockefellers are not the first divesters, of course—already the World Council of Churches, big Catholic colleges, Australian pension funds, and various city governments have done the right and powerful thing. (An Oxford study last year called it the fastest-growing corporate divestment campaign in history). But for the Rockefellers—the original fossil-fuel fortune, the heirs to John D. who founded Standard Oil/Esso/Exxon—to cut their ties is sign enough of the Holy Spirit for me.

And then Heintz introduced one of the men who made it happen, Rev. Lennox Yearwood of the Hip Hop Caucus. Yearwood—who has done more than anyone to knit together the civil rights and environmental movements—gave a sermon of the kind that the cathedral has rarely seen, a soaring and crawling tour of our folly and our hope. “This is our lunch-counter movement for the 21st century,” he said, and in that moment every Rockefeller would have gone to jail with him.

Maybe even more so a minute later, when he introduced singer Antonique Smith, one of the stars of the album he's produced



Green Patriot Posters

Now that the Rockefellers have divested, what excuse does anyone else have?

the head of the Rockefeller Brothers Fund, cued up a video address from Desmond Tutu, calling for “an end to the fossil-fuel era.” Dressed in his scarlet robes, Tutu saluted activists, saying “the destruction of the Earth's environment is the human rights challenge of our time,” and demanded that institutions around the planet end their investments in fossil-fuel companies.

That was pretty good: One of our planet's most revered church leaders speaking truth to power. And then power spoke back. Representing the Rockefeller family, Heintz said

of contemporary artists covering great environmental anthems. Smith—who's listened, I think, to some Mahalia Jackson in her time—offered her remake of Marvin Gaye's classic “Mercy Mercy Me (The Ecology),” probably the greatest ecological song ever written.

There, at 110th and Amsterdam, with the words of that great urban bard mixing with the earnest promises of the Rockefellers, it felt like history was finally moving in the right direction. Fast enough? Of that there is no guarantee, given the speed with which the physical planet is now changing. But the pace of our moral response is accelerating (now that the Rockefellers have divested,

what excuse does anyone else have?). The fight is on. ■



Bill McKibben is the Schumann Distinguished Scholar at Middlebury College in Vermont and founder of 350.org.

LOOKING FOR THAT SPECIAL GIFT FOR YOUR LOVED ONES?

Make a gift in their honor that will help end
hunger at home and abroad www.bread.org/gift



breadfortheworld
HAVE FAITH. END HUNGER.



Give a gift for the heart, mind, and spirit

(Then give another one, free!)

Purchase one gift subscription to
Sojourners magazine for \$39.95 and get
the second one FREE!

- **Save:** Give two gifts for half the price.
- **Give:** Now two people will receive a gift they'll be able to enjoy all year long.
- **Relax:** It's hassle-free—just call 1-800-678-9691 and say you want the 2-for-1 deal, or order online at sojo.net/bogo.
- **Remember:** Your gift subscriptions support *Sojourners* and our work for justice and peace.

YES—two gift subscriptions for the price of one! Give your friends and family the gift of good reading with a full year of *Sojourners*, chock-full of great articles, stories, interviews, commentaries, poetry, humor, and more!

Order your 2-for-1 *Sojourners* gift subscriptions today.

**Call 1-800-678-9691
or visit sojo.net/bogo.**



TACKLING the Hard Questions

It's time for Bible-believing Christians to take a new look at what scripture teaches us about gays and lesbians—and what it means to be a faithful church • by DAVID P. GUSHEE

YOU CAN'T TURN AROUND these days in Christian circles without bumping into questions around gays and lesbians and the church. It has become the hottest of all hot potatoes in evangelical Christianity, as it has in much of U.S. and global culture.

Long-term consensus evangelical positions and practices on various aspects of “the gay issue” are being challenged at every turn. Indeed, some have already given way.

It used to be that anyone with same-sex desires was considered willfully perverse; but now many evangelicals acknowledge the clinically/medically recognized category of same-sex attraction (SSA), or sexual orientation, as a mysterious but globally recurring pattern among 3 to 5 percent of the human family.

It used to be that LGBT people were frequent targets of derogatory preaching and teaching, often so fierce that some church folks were motivated in the direction of hatred, contempt, and bullying; but now more and more preachers and teachers are moderating their language so as not to do harm.

It used to be that evangelicals sent those with SSA off to “reparative” or “ex-gay”

therapies; but now those harmful and futile “treatments” have been discredited and are fading fast, as evidenced for example by Exodus International’s closure and apology in 2013 and its leader Alan Chambers’ statement that “99.9 percent” of the people they had tried to help had not experienced a change in their sexual orientation. More evangelicals are recognizing the importance of not harming their own gay and lesbian adolescents and family members. Family acceptance and suicide prevention are becoming important concerns.

It used to be that evangelicals rejected from church membership anyone who experienced same-sex attraction or claimed a gay or lesbian identity; but now more and more evangelicals are at least opening their doors to LGBT visitors and members—even if they hesitate to go further than that.

The current frontier on this issue is whether evangelicals will come to terms with how to respect, accept, and even offer support for covenantal same-sex relationships being undertaken by their gay and lesbian minority. This is to be distinguished from how churches are to relate to the sweeping social change now taking place in U.S. marriage law, with gay marriage rapidly becoming legalized all over the country. Some evangelicals have already arrived at a

Substantial scholarly and popular that questions how the B

position of support for civil-marriage equality based on constitutional principles such as equal protection, even where they hesitate before the concept of the church blessing marital or marriage-like unions of gay couples. There are fine Christians on both sides, and civil dialogue about such matters, in the spirit of Romans 14, is absolutely essential, and all too rare.

CERTAINLY THIS ISSUE is affecting the vitality and mission of the church, and exposing profound generational differences. What survives of the “evangelical consensus” is not fully persuading the youth-group kids and Christian college students who populate our grassroots. Many of these young people have made clear to pollsters and anyone else who is listening that they find the traditional Christian treatment of, and views about, gays and lesbians a problem for their faith and for their relationships with people they care about, including gay and lesbian friends.

Many are leaving the church, or at least evangelicalism, over these matters. According to Public Religion Research, 70 percent of America’s most unchurched

generation, the Millennials, say that “religious groups are alienating young people by being too judgmental about gay and lesbian issues,” and 31 percent of those millennials who have left the church say this was an important factor in why they left. Gabe Lyons and David Kinnaman reported the problem as far back as their 2007 book *unChristian*, in which an overwhelming number of respondents identified the term “Christian” with “anti-gay.”

Most dissenting Christians and ex-Christians have not come up with a biblical or theological alternative to traditionalist views of LGBT people and their relationships. But they are not satisfied at all with the status quo. And they sure want to be able to talk about these questions in some fresh ways and in open, uncensored spaces. Anyone who works with young Christians has encountered these concerns. I see them every day in my work as a college and seminary professor.

These believers are not interested in just going along to get along with culture. But they sense that there is something very wrong with the church’s rejection and

mistreatment of their friends. They don’t want a culturally libertine “anything goes” sexual ethic. They don’t like the collapsing families that have hurt them too. But they don’t really see how offering a more loving welcome to LGBT Christians has anything to do with those deeper problems.

SOME OF US in Christian work, like me in my work as a pastor and professor, have now come to know gay, lesbian, and bisexual Christians—committed, believing, baptized, morally serious followers of Jesus. There are millions of such “sexual other” Christians in the U.S. alone, and millions more around the world.

These Christians have been there all along. Until I began meeting them, I did not know that these gay and lesbian believers were already a part of the Christian community. That contributed to my total neglect of their suffering, which today I profoundly regret. Certainly their testimony is that they have been badly hurt.

I have heard so many stories by now. One of the most harrowing was told by a friend of mine I will call William. When this deeply devout evangelical Christian came out as gay, his father and five of his six siblings rejected ever knowing him. When William sought to visit his father in the hospital while he lay dying, his father called out from the bed these pulverizing words: “I don’t have a son named William.” Brothers and sisters, how does one ever recover from that?

So LGBT people have a problem with the church. And those who love them have a problem with the church that is at least as intense. This is not a perception problem, solvable by a rebranding campaign and a PR firm. This is a human suffering problem within the very heart of the church. And many of those sufferers are very young. They are adolescents and young adults just now coming to terms with their sexuality. They are very badly wounded. Some



Our evangelical literature is emerging The Bible has been interpreted.

have been kicked out of their homes or fled, joining a rapidly rising, young, hugely vulnerable homeless population in our cities. My own Atlanta has recently seen the birth of a shelter called Lost-n-Found Youth, just for the LGBT homeless. It is hard to picture a population more appropriately designated as among “the least of these” Jesus calls us to love and serve.

I AM ASKING whether the church should change our mind and our practices in relation to Christian LGBT persons and their relationships—not because we are under pressure from a hostile culture to do so, but because within the terms of our own faith we might now conclude that this is one of those cases in 2,000 years of Christian history where we have gotten some things wrong.

To transform how LGBT people are treated by and in the church is to change our attitude and practice in a manner fully consistent with historic Christian convictions about the gospel and the church. A church that offers hospitable welcome to gay people, lesbian people, and other “sexual others” as grateful recipients of God’s saving love in Jesus Christ is in fact a church faithful to the gospel and what it means to be the church. Much needed change can take place without reconsidering the sexual ethics issues at all.

THE PAST DECADE has seen a dramatic shift in the intellectual and ecclesial terrain. A substantial body of scholarly and popular literature is developing—not just in the older ecumenical/liberal conversation (three decades old at least), but also in the evangelical/conservative precincts of American Christianity.

Notably, evangelical Christianity is producing a first generation of fresh thinking, much of it popular and a bit of it by scholars, some of it written by self-identified LGBT evangelicals (see “Disputable Matters,” page 22).

The fact that gay people—indeed, gay evangelical Christians—are no longer just being talked about but are finding their own voices and making scriptural, theological, and ethical arguments for

themselves, inevitably changes the nature of the conversation—if we are willing to have a conversation. It is harder to simply dehumanize and dismiss a flesh-and-blood human being with a name and a family and a history of serving Christ in the local church.

And some of what this literature is questioning is how the Bible has been interpreted.

PROTESTANT TRADITIONALISTS, who stake their knowledge claims on biblical inspiration and authority, generally express strong certainty that the Bible clearly teaches

It is hard to picture a population more appropriately designated as among “the least of these” that Jesus calls us to love and serve.

that there can be no morally legitimate same-sex (sexual-romantic) relationships, and this conviction often trickles backward to the implicit or explicit conclusion that one cannot be both gay and Christian. This then leads to the rejection of an entire slice of the human community as one finds it in Christian families and churches.

These passages are a scorched-earth zone by now: Genesis 1-2, Genesis 19, Leviticus 18/20, 1 Corinthians 6:9/1 Timothy 1:10, Romans 1:18-32. In my new book, *Changing Our Mind*, I devote careful consideration to each of these passages, their literary and historical contexts, and the application of them to Christian life today. My conclusion is that they do not offer open-and-shut evidence that covenantal lifetime relationships that correspond to one’s actual sexual orientation—even when it is gay or lesbian—must be ruled out. At least, we ought to be able to have the conversation. Here’s why:

Genesis 1-2 says many awesomely important things, including that human beings are made male and female in the image of God, that it is not good to be alone, and that God made the woman for the man and gave her to him as a helper-partner. Perhaps this establishes that God’s pre-Fall design for sexuality was exclusively male-female, though of course the text does not comment on an

alternative. And evangelicals believe we live in a fallen world, a Genesis 3 world, not just a Genesis 1-2 world. So everyone’s sexuality is affected, and the best any of us can do in biblical terms is to strive to make and keep faithful covenant marriages. If we acknowledge such a thing as SSA, and if we don’t ask gay and lesbian people to try to fake marriages with opposite-sex people to whom they have no attraction, what exactly are they supposed to do with their sexuality? Does a reading of Genesis really settle that question? Might they be invited into the same moral

standard we require of straight believers?

The Sodom and Gomorrah story (Genesis 19) offers a harrowing tale of judgment on a wicked city, despite Abraham’s intervention. But there is no reason to think that the wickedness of the city should be identified with “homosexuality.” Despite abundant references to Sodom elsewhere in the Bible, never is its sin described as homosexuality or even sexual. The story is about violence to strangers in the form of attempted gang rape. It’s more like a prison rape text than a sexual ethics text.

The Leviticus passages in chapters 18 and 20 appear to ban male same-sex acts. But they don’t say why. The speculations of scholars range from concerns over remaining distinct from the (cultic?) practices of pagan neighbors, confusion of male and female gender roles and thus the shaming of men, associations with rape, and procreation (e.g., sex should be procreative). These have limited relevance to the contemporary discussion of loving, covenantal same-sex relationships. And how often do Christians cite Leviticus today about anything else?

The interpretations of 1 Corinthians 6:9 and 1 Timothy 1:10 hinge on the reading of two obscure Greek words (*malakoi* and *arsenokoitai*), either individually or in

Gay evangelical Christians are fir- scriptural, theological, and eth

combination, placed in long vice lists with little obvious context. Translations of these terms have varied so widely for a good reason. Unfortunately, because 1 Corinthians 6 consigns everyone practicing this list of vices to exile from the kingdom of God, this has made “you are going to hell” a typical response to an adolescent’s admission of same-sex desires. Evangelical scholar James Brownson’s close study of the terms used in these two passages leads him to suggest that they may well refer to those involved in exploiting the vulnerable for sex, including what today we would call sexual traffickers, pimps, johns, predators, and abusers. How might the history of Christian treatment of gays and lesbians have been different if these words had been translated “sex traffickers” or “sexual exploiters” or “rapists” or “sexual predators” or “pimps”?

THE BIG KAHUNA is, of course, Romans 1:26-27. Traditionalists have understood this scripture (and its complex broader text, Romans 1:18-32) as establishing the illegitimacy of same-sex relationships and, indeed, their gross perversity. The text is so

strongly worded as to have contributed to a great deal of Christian contempt for gay and lesbian people.

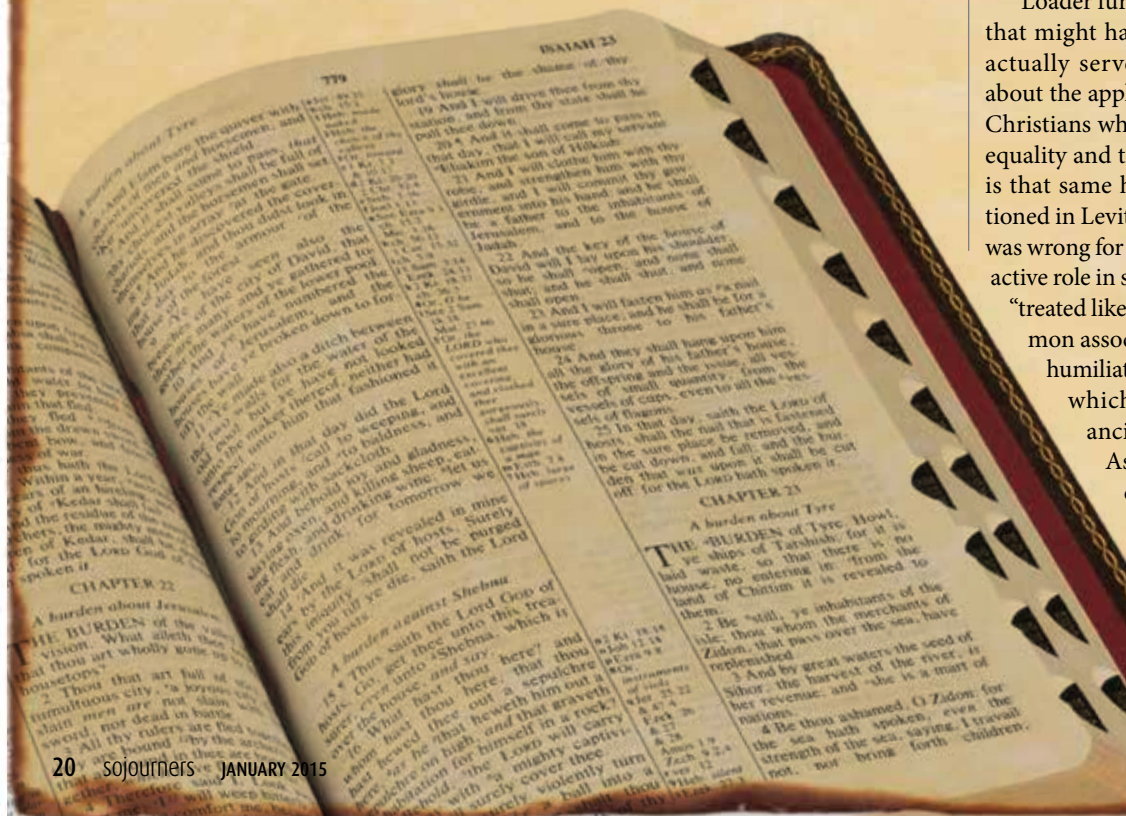
Scholars historically have agreed that Paul’s purpose in Romans 1-3 is to paint a theological picture of the world leading to the conclusion that every human being desperately needs the salvation offered by God through Jesus Christ. After celebrating the gospel that saves both Jew and Greek, in Romans 1:18-32 Paul points his indictment primarily toward the characteristic sins of the pagan Gentile population. Paul indicts those who dishonor God by engaging in the futile practices of idol worship. In response, aggrieved God’s punishment is that God “gave them up” to the dishonorable/shameful lusts, impurity, and degrading passions that they now desire (Romans 1:24-26). Their consequent spiral downward into moral debasement is then illustrated by a list of 22 types of vice (1:26-32) including (vv. 29-31) “every kind of wickedness, evil, covetousness, malice ... envy, murder, strife, deceit, craftiness, they are gossips, slanderers, God-haters, insolent, haughty, boastful, inventors of evil, rebellious toward parents,

foolish, faithless, heartless, ruthless.”

But, fatefully, the one issue Paul singles out for more extended treatment in this passage is same-sex intercourse. Romans 1:26-27 is the most widely cited passage in the entire LGBT debate: “For this reason God gave them up to degrading passions. Their women exchanged natural intercourse for unnatural, and in the same way also the men, giving up natural intercourse with women, were consumed with passion for one another. Men committed shameful acts with men and received in their own persons the due penalty for their error.”

The massive scholarly literature about this text flows in a number of directions. William Loader suggests that Paul may be attempting to integrate a conservative strand of Greco-Roman intellectual and moral thinking related to the “natural” and universal access to knowledge of the natural. And any review of what is known of Roman sexual practices and norms, including the wide acceptance of same-sex acts in various circumstances, including by married men, demonstrates their dramatic variance from traditional Jewish sexual ethics.

Loader further suggests cultural themes that might have affected Paul and would actually serve to raise strong questions about the applicability of this text to many Christians who are committed to women’s equality and to social justice. One of these is that same honor/shame concern mentioned in Leviticus 18/20, which held that it was wrong for men to give up their superior, active role in sex and allow themselves to be “treated like women.” Another is the common association of male-male sex with humiliating, violent rape, often in war, which so often happened in the ancient world, as in Genesis 19. As for women, their presumed designed/natural passivity as the recipient of male desire in sex would be shockingly overridden in volitional same-sex acts, if this is what Paul’s reference here is even



nding their own voices and making ical arguments for themselves.

about. It would be a disturbing expression of women's agency in a patriarchal society, and thus viewed as unnatural, and certainly as a threat to male power. Probably most readers of this essay would not find any of these concerns especially persuasive today.

By using the language of "exchanging" or "giving up" "natural" for "unnatural" intercourse, Paul may be saying that he thinks those engaging in same-sex intercourse were capable of "normal," "natural" heterosexual relations but perversely chose same-sex. Empirically speaking, this was sometimes true then, as it is now. But we now know that a small sexual minority is not at all capable of heterosexual attraction or relations. It does not seem that they can be fairly described as "exchanging" or "giving up" natural for unnatural sex. This raises reasonable questions about the fairness of applying this description to that part of the human community today.

Same-sex behavior in the Greco-Roman world very often, though not always, looked like pederasty, prostitution, and master-slave sex, and these were criticized by pagan moralists and not just Christians. These were primarily indulgences of privileged men who had the power to take and use other people's bodies for pleasure, and the luxury to spend a fair amount of time messing around with all different kinds of sex. For these men, a wife alone was not enough. They wanted novelty, excess, pleasures of ever more exotic kinds. Some argue that Paul is reacting to this culture of sexual excess, selfishness, and sanctioned adultery in Romans 1, and that the same-sex part of the problem was incidental rather than central.

Harvard-trained classicist Sarah Ruden, in her widely praised book *Paul Among the People*, describes widespread and quite vile Greco-Roman cultural practices authorizing often violent anal rape of powerless young men, especially slaves, but really anybody of lower social status. She documents how young boys had to be very carefully protected from sexual attacks, which could happen at any time, humiliating them emotionally and perhaps destroying them physically. Ruden is convinced that this is what Paul had in mind when he thought

about same-sex interest and activity, and this is why he links it to other vices of excess and debauchery in Romans 1. She claims Paul's teachings on sexuality are in large part reflective of revulsion at this kind of cultural depravity, his desire to protect the bodies and souls of the innocent, and his commitment to disciplining young Christians who would not participate in this vicious and widespread behavior. If this was his

Does what Paul so harshly condemns in Romans 1 have anything to do with that devout, loving, lesbian couple who sit in the third row at church?

goal, no one could have a dispute with Paul. We could all agree that a culture like this is depraved.

Paul was writing to Roman Christians, some of whom had connections in the Roman imperial court, and all of whom would be familiar with the evil and craziness there. The violence, carousing, and orgiastic sexuality of that court, including Gaius Caligula's many depravities and Nero's own same-sex relations, were legendary. If Paul had the imperial court in mind while painting his broad brushstrokes about the idolatrous debauchery of the Gentile world, that would mean that Romans 1:18-32 might have functioned as a highly evocative, deeply contextual, thinly veiled depiction of the Roman imperial court as a macabre worst-case symbol of Gentile depravity. This connects to a broader theme in recent Pauline scholarship about Paul's defiance of the Roman Empire in the name of the one Lord, Jesus Christ. This really important discovery would limit the applicability of this text for contemporary circumstances that are far different from the Roman court. Those attending to the issue of empire today might find resonances here.

Perhaps one can see how it is reasonable to suggest that Paul's theological purpose in Romans 1, and the religious and cultural context that he swam in when he wrote it, precluded him from speaking sympathetically about any kind of same-sex

relationships. The "subject" may seem to be the same, but the context is so different that Paul's words may be of little relevance to the question of covenanted same-sex relations among devoted Christians.

It is appropriate to wonder whether what Paul is so harshly condemning in Romans 1 has much if anything to do with that devout, loving, lesbian couple who have been together 20 years and sit in the third

row at church. Their lives do not at all look like the overall picture of depravity offered in Romans 1:18-32. You certainly wonder about this when you know that couple—or when you are that couple.

THE LGBT ISSUE is not going away. The churches will not likely find agreement on every aspect of these matters anytime soon. A new evangelical conversation should begin with Christian love and pastoral concern for all people, especially our own closeted adolescents and wounded exiles. We must pay attention to serious clinical and medical findings about the nature of sexual orientation and gender identity. We must help families and churches come to full acceptance and loving responsiveness to their own young people who come out as LGBT. Together, with a commitment to loving every neighbor as Christ does, we can tackle the rest of the hard questions before us. Together. All of us. ■

David P. Gushee, the Distinguished University Professor of Christian Ethics at Mercer University, is author of 20 books on Christian ethics and a Sojourners contributing editor. This article is adapted with permission from his new book Changing Our Mind: A call from America's leading evangelical ethics scholar for full acceptance of LGBT Christians in the church (Read the Spirit, 2014).





Disputable Matters

Five books that are changing the evangelical discussion about LGBT Christians and the church • by DAVID P. GUSHEE

EVANGELICAL CHRISTIANITY has changed significantly over the last 40 years on issues of gender, race, and nation. But until now it has not changed on homosexuality. Until the last five years, any self-identified evangelical Christian (in the United States, at least) suggesting that Christians might need to change some aspect of their teaching about same-sex-oriented people and their relationships has been (metaphorically, so far) banished by the evangelical community.

But that reality has begun to shift. Five books, all published in 2013-14, represent the newest wave of U.S. evangelical reflection on LGBT matters. Evangelical New Testament scholar James Brownson published *Bible, Gender, Sexuality* in February 2013. Vineyard pastor Ken Wilson unveiled *A Letter to My Congregation* in February 2014; Matthew Vines posted *God and the Gay Christian* last April; Wendy VanderWal-Gritter's *Generous Spaciousness* came out in May; and evangelical Presbyterian Mark Achtemeier released *The Bible's Yes to Same-Sex Marriage* in June. And my own *Changing Our Mind* came out in October.

Brownson's work reveals that at least some of those who tackle questions about LGBT people and evangelical Christianity are scaling the great mountain of biblical scholarship and related literature on sexuality. In an early chapter he takes on in a broad way "traditionalist" Christian scholarship, notably in the work of Robert Gagnon, a mainline conservative at Pittsburgh Seminary. Gagnon's primary claim is that the Bible's consistent message about sex reveals a God-given design in creation (Genesis 1-2)

involving physical/biological sexual complementarity between male and female. Gagnon argues that this creation theme underlies Paul's condemnation in Romans 1:24-27 as well.

Brownson, a professor at the Reformed Church in America's Western Theological Seminary, takes on Gagnon's approach. Through very careful research on both Genesis 1-2 and echoes later in scripture, Brownson shows convincingly that the Genesis texts do not emphasize physical/biological complementarity between male and female, in any of the forms argued by traditionalists, but instead the similarity and equal value of male and female. He suggests that Genesis 2:24 ("one-flesh") is really about the forming by two of a binding kinship relationship, and not about anatomical fitting together in the sexual act.

Brownson then examines the relevant biblical passages and underlying "moral logics" shaping the Bible's texts on sexuality. He does this through his own original research and digging in the best of biblical scholarship, as well as sufficient reading in contemporary Christian sexual ethics and the literature related to LGBT matters. It is an extraordinary achievement. Brownson identifies the themes of patriarchy (and an egalitarian strand in scripture), the meaning of "one-flesh," the role of procreation in sexual ethics, and celibacy as central to Christian sexual ethics, carefully reporting on ancient and biblical understandings and then attempting to make a leap across cultures to consider their applicability in our own time.

In the end, Brownson offers a book that graciously reports the traditionalist position but very carefully breaks with it and shows the reasons why. This book is the achievement of a lifetime, in my view the most important work any Christian scholar has contributed to the recent conversation.

MARK ACHTEMEIER IS another senior leader in U.S. Christianity, this time in the Presbyterian Church (USA). He is a pastor and theologian who taught ethics for 15 years

ethic that is marital, holistic, deeply self-giving, and enabling people to grow toward a fuller reflection of God's image. He does not think this rules out marital-covenantal same-sex relations.

Ken Wilson writes with the heart of the Vineyard Church pastor he has been for more than 40 years. Like Achtemeier, he chronicles his own surprising change of mind and heart toward a posture of "acceptance" and "embrace" of LGBT Christians. The way he does this, though, is unique in

was indeed saying this; I also fear that this task will prove almost impossible in our contemporary churches, with our shallow commitment to particular communities and our cultural context of angry, ruthless, ideological polarization.

Wendy VanderWal-Gritter's book is experiential in a different way. A Canadian, Gritter comes out of the ex-gay ministry world with massive direct ministry experience with the human beings at the center of this horrible dispute. Her book tells her own story of turning away from reparative therapy approaches with their associated political baggage toward a posture of "generous spaciousness" as the key response to gay Christians in the church. In her rather lengthy book, she offers reflections on such varied matters as the legitimacy of ex-gay ministries, the nature of sexuality, the spectrum of views on sexuality in the church, the coming-out process, best practices for congregational dialogue, and the biblical and hermeneutical issues. Like Wilson, Gritter also thinks that a "disputable matters" interpretation is very helpful in working through these questions.

The book offers a detailed and narratively rich discussion of the actual experiences of LGBT evangelical Christians, showing that their responses to their sexuality vary dramatically, and calling the rest of us toward a respectful posture. This in itself makes it an excellent pastoral resource, especially in the conservative evangelical world. It should be able to be heard there because Gritter never takes a normative stance embracing same-sex relationships. She wants to encourage a certain set of Christian virtues, such as hospitality and peaceableness, as the preconditions for adequate response to gay Christians and to the church's dialogue with and about them.

MATTHEW VINES HAS quickly become the most famous advocate for full inclusion of LGBT Christians in the U.S. evangelical world, and he is only 23 years old. Raised in a conservative evangelical congregation in Kansas, the whip-smart young man graduated from high school and started at Harvard University. But there his acknowledgment of his own gay sexual orientation led him on a journey back home to apply his intelligence to the controverted question of same-sex relationships. For several years he



Matthew Vines is leading a youth movement demanding reconsideration of evangelicalism's exclusion of people like him.

at Dubuque Seminary. Achtemeier notes that in the late 1990s he took the conservative position when his denomination was fighting over whether to permit the ordination of openly gay and lesbian ministers. But his opening line states, "This book is the story of a change of heart." Achtemeier here documents his defection from the position he once held, though he remains an evangelical.

Like many of us, Achtemeier's heart has been changed because he has engaged the suffering of earnest, devoted Christians who also turn out to be ineradicably same-sex in their sexual orientation. Existentially changed, Achtemeier narrates how he then went back to the Bible for a fresh look. Achtemeier classifies the traditionalist texts as "fragments" that do not cohere with the "broader witness of scripture," and says that the New Testament itself offers plenty of evidence of the way Jesus and the early church rejected applications of biblical law that actually directed people away from the will of God rather than toward it.

Like Brownson, Achtemeier calls Christians to read not just the texts on their face but to seek the "coherent, good sense reasons" for what the texts say and therefore what God the Lawgiver intended. Other principles of good biblical interpretation, he says, include being Christ-centered, interpreting scripture by scripture, and interpreting passages in biblical and historical context. Constructively, this yields a sexual

the literature—he writes a long letter to his congregation, only later deciding to share it with a wider audience in the form of this published book.

This extraordinary pastoral letter describes what it is like to be a pastor attempting to do gospel ministry, especially in relation to the constantly excluded gay and lesbian ones in, near, and out of the church. He discusses the difficult responsibility of pastoral leadership on such a conflicted matter, the challenge of moral and spiritual discernment, the homework required in theology and exegesis, his disappointment with what passes for biblical scholarship, and the difficulty of "simply" making decisions for and with one congregation when a "clenched" evangelical world starts paying politicized attention as well. The broader back story concerns Vineyard Church politics, as a pastor-teacher-writer formerly recognized as a denominational leader begins to experience his own increasingly severe exclusion due to his decision to follow what he believes is God's leading.

The most innovative proposal Wilson offers is for congregations to treat LGBT concerns under the neglected "disputable matters" rubric offered in Romans 14-15. Wilson's "third way" is found right here: a gospel- and Christ-centered willingness to live together in grateful community not dependent on shared moral convictions on all matters. I think he is right, that Paul

Poetry

BY KRISTINA LACELLE-PETERSON

read everything he could get his hands on, finally producing first a video that went viral, then *God and the Gay Christian*, and finally an organization (The Reformation Project) with mushrooming visibility and impact.

Vines' overall project is to revisit the biblical materials and the massive related scholarly literature to show that the Bible does indeed make space for covenanted same-sex relationships. One might quibble with particular judgments, as have a battalion of credentialed critics, but overall I would describe the level of scholarship that Vines offers here as better than most of what one finds on the revisionist side and extraordinary in light of his level of training. It deserves a place on the shelf of works one must read when engaging these matters.

But it is the person who matters at least as much as the book. This cheerful, confident young man—a person under constant attack by “Christian” enemies—is an out gay Christian not pledged to lifetime celibacy and utterly clear about his evangelical identity. He is leading a youth movement demanding reconsideration of evangelicalism's exclusion of people like him.

The current situation, then, looks like this: Evangelical revisionists are growing in number and voice. Voices counseling respectful dialogue are still speaking, but the main normative issues are increasingly being joined. Some young gay evangelicals are staying and fighting rather than running away. Evangelical young people generally find their intransigent elders obnoxious and their silent leaders cowardly. Many are deeply attracted to youth movements for change led by Matthew Vines and others. A few senior scholars such as Brownson and Achtemeier (and now Gushee) are supporting the youth crusade. This is creating ever greater anxiety and anger among increasingly marginalized traditionalists. This fight feels like it is reaching a crescendo. History will record who was on what side, and when. ■

David P. Gushee is Distinguished University Professor of Christian Ethics at Mercer University, a Sojourners contributing editor, and author of the new book *Changing Our Mind: A call from America's leading evangelical ethics scholar for full acceptance of LGBT Christians in the church* (Read the Spirit, 2014).



Paula Bronstein

Anna

I.

The wailing and the murmured prayers,
the animal ruckus, and coin against coin,
smoke hanging in the temple spaces—
offerings that bear our love to the seat of heaven.

For sixty years my soul has leaned
so hard toward the Almighty, I'm open
like a flower drenched with light
that blossoms into words.

Yet I wonder, will I rest too soon
will I sleep like Miriam
with no honey from the Promised Land
to sweeten this old life?

II.

But now she enters with new-mother steps,
her strong gaze searching us
for hearts that see. I turn to tell all
who wait, who yearn for consolation,

look, she brings the Word most fully,
this young woman cradling the body
of Emmanuel against her heart
arms trembling with the weight.

Kristina LaCelle-Peterson is an associate professor of religion and part of the Center for Faith, Justice, and Global Engagement at Houghton College in New York.

THE BEATITUDES

Sojourners invited some of our favorite contemporary authors—religious and otherwise—to offer their reflections on the beatitudes. First in a series.

“Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth.”
—Matthew 5:5

What About the Meek?

Do you always have to let bullies kick sand in your face at the beach?

by **MARGARET ATWOOD**

THIS IS SURELY the most difficult beatitude. First, it's hard to interpret. Does “meek” mean a Uriah Heep-like unctuous humbleness? Does it mean softness or gentleness or weakness? Are “the meek” the powerless, or perhaps the poor? Is their meekness to be displayed toward God, but not toward people? How meek is meek, and do you always have to let bullies kick sand in your face at the beach?

Next, what about “inherit”? That's a legalistic term; who's going to die so someone else gets an inheritance? Will the non-meek be pushed over a cliff so that only the meek are left? Or will the non-meek be lowered in status and the meek become rulers, thereby shedding their meekness?

And what about “the earth”? Another beatitude refers to the kingdom of heaven—the poor in spirit have it already, it seems—but “the meek” will instead inherit “the earth.” The material world.

Being Canadian, I memorized the beatitudes at school. But I wondered whether “the meek” had to be *people*. Could they be some other life form? Scottish physiologist J.S. Haldane felt God shows an inordinate fondness for beetles—having created so many—and my own father speculated that, if humankind destroyed itself by nuclear bombs or otherwise, the earth would be inherited by cockroaches. That would explain everything!

But the opposite of “meek” is surely “proud,” and pride goeth before a fall. Perhaps the meek will inherit when the proud become top-heavy and topple over, as in the reversals of fortune that accompany revolutions. Many of the beatitudes propose place-changing: Those who are up will be down, and vice versa. Is this a warning to the one percent to stop hoarding and start sharing?

What would meekness really be like in action? The three books of my MaddAddam Trilogy contain the Crakers, who lack aggression. To make this plausible, I

had to give them some other characteristics. One reason for aggression is sexual competitiveness, so my new Crakers mate seasonally, communally, and without violence. Another reason is greed for *stuff*—those who go to war hope to acquire land, money, slaves, riches, and so forth—so my Crakers aren't interested in stuff. They don't wear clothes, farm land (they can eat leaves), or have social hierarchies.

This is not a virtue in them: They don't choose their meekness; they're just made that way. It follows that they would have to be protected from beings of our sort, because they would quickly be killed by us.

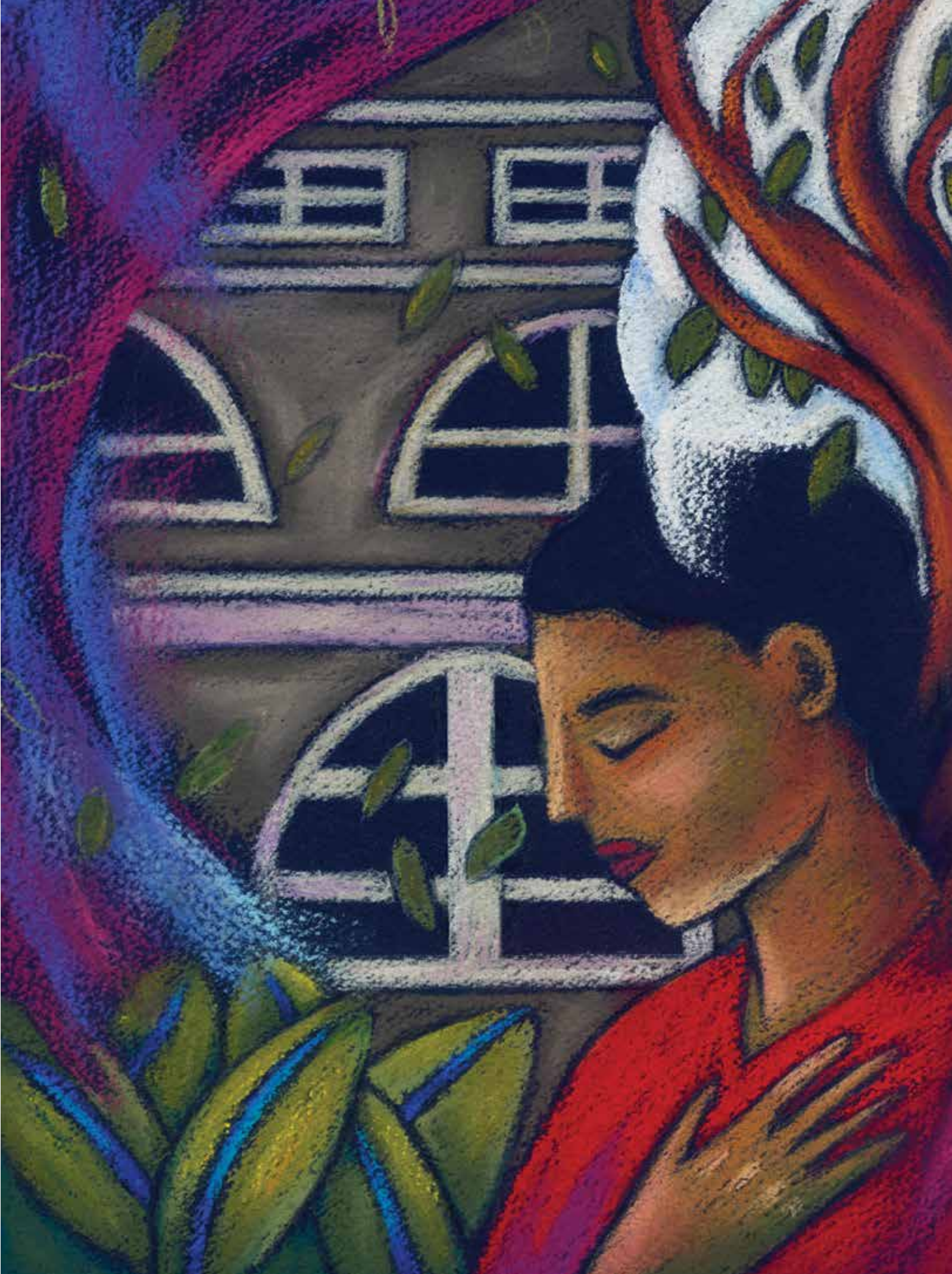
In the same trilogy there's a group that makes consciously meek choices. These are the God's Gardeners, who attempt a green vegetable-raising lifestyle on flat rooftops in a slum. They've opted out from the sinister hierarchies that surround them and are trying to live in a nonviolent manner that is not harmful to other life forms or to the planet. That's ultra-meek! It's much more difficult to live this way than you might think at first. (Toilet paper, yes or no? What about the trees? Every small item must be considered.)

Inevitably the moment of decision arrives for the God's Gardeners: What should they do when they're threatened physically? Should they defend themselves or not? If not—if they persist in their ultra-meekness—their chances of inheriting anything so concrete as “the earth” will rapidly vanish.

Matthew 5:5 is a paradoxical beatitude, and fraught with pitfalls and perils, once you start considering it. But Jesus was speaking at the time of the Roman Empire, and paradox is a useful tool when you're surrounded by the double-plus-unmeek. ■

Margaret Atwood, author of The Handmaid's Tale and more than 40 other works, lives in Canada. Her newest book is the short story collection Stone Mattress: Nine Tales (Nan A. Talese/Doubleday).

Illustration by M.P. Wiggins



BEAR MO

We all sat for a moment working
on our cones, and making sure
they didn't drip on the
pristine interior
of the parish
Buick.



DUNTAIN

Five boys and one quiet honest wry excellent priest • by BRIAN DOYLE

FATHER PAUL DROVE US in one of the two parish cars. There were five of us boys. The parish cars were Buicks, and they were huge and black. It was late September. All five of us were 13 years old.

Now that we had achieved the age of reason we were allowed to visit the seminary to begin the process of discernment. Father Paul had high hopes but low expectations. If even one of us expressed serious interest in a second visit to the seminary, he would count the weekend a roaring success and no mistake, as he told the pastor.

They were leaning against the car as we climbed in. The pastor was a monsignor. A monsignor was halfway between priest and bishop. We had a choice of seminaries, said Father Paul to us as we drove off. We could visit the Capuchin seminary or the Franciscan seminary. They were in the same town up on the river, and both in his experience were excellent in shaping good priests.

One of us voted for the Franciscans because he had a dog and Francis loved animals, and three of us voted for the Capuchins because the word Capuchin was cool. I voted for the Capuchins because my dad's best friend was a small hilarious Capuchin, so as far as I knew the Capuchins were small and hilarious and cool.

We drove through the Borough of Queens, through the Borough of the Bronx, and then north along the mighty Hudson River, which is not its original name, of course, said Father Paul. The first people here had many names for it, among them the Shatemuc, the River of the Pelicans, and Mohicanhitheck, the River of the Wolves.

I have seen pelicans here but I have not seen wolves as yet. We stared out the window at the river and saw gulls and crows and herons and ducks and maybe a hawk but no pelicans or wolves.



You could see that he actually liked
being a priest, and that to him
it was a cool thing to be,
but he didn't think
it made him holier or
more important than
anyone else.

Father Paul had started to talk about vocations while we were still in the Bronx, but then he had wisely turned the conversation to the Mets, who had great pitching this year, for once. At Dobbs Ferry the river grew wider, and you could hardly see across it to the steep wooded cliffs of the Palisades. Tarrytown, Sleepy Hollow. Where the headless horseman roamed of old. Ossining, Croton Bay. Bear Mountain. The first European explorers, said Father Paul, all remarked on the particular sheen of the black bears in this area; my theory is that it had to do with their diet, perhaps a rich crop of beech nuts. The staff at the seminary tell me they see a great number of bears when their apple trees are ripe, and that they do not rake up fallen apples, but leave them for the bears. Perhaps you young men will see bears this weekend.

We saw a great many things that weekend, and the staff at the seminary was kindly and courteous, although much taller than the Capuchin I knew, and while one of the Capuchins in particular was refreshingly honest about the priesthood, which he said was unrewarding financially but rich in meditative opportunities and unexpected friends, none of the five of us were able to discern any inclination to explore our potential vocations, and Father Paul drove us back home on Sunday afternoon. We listened to the Mets on the radio. The Mets beat the Phillies to go up eight games with two to play, and not even the Mets can lose the pennant up eight games with two to play, as Father Paul said. When the Mets got the last out we were in Yonkers, and Father Paul was so pleased at the victory he stopped and bought us ice cream.

I NEVER DID discern the possibility of a vocation to the priesthood that weekend, or any other time in my long life, but there were two moments that stay with me even now about that trip—I think because they were my initial glimpses of the deeper lives of priests.

The first was when one of us shyly asked the honest Capuchin about celibacy. We were sitting at a picnic table near the apple orchard, the five of us boys and the honest Capuchin, and he was silent for a moment, and then he said, In my experience celibacy is not the terrible cross to bear that

everyone thinks it is; loneliness is the much heavier burden. Sometimes you do feel awfully alone. We talk about being close to God, as priests, and devoting ourselves to God's work, and consciously giving up one sort of life so as to be able to devote ourselves to another with our whole heart and mind, but to be honest there are a lot of times when you are just really lonely. I don't want to mislead you about that. You try to face it straight, is all I can say. I try to stay active. I walk in the woods a great deal when it comes. Sometimes I drive down to Bear Mountain and walk there for a while. Indeed there are bears on Bear Mountain, and a remarkable number of owls. An enterprising naturalist would study the owls on Bear Mountain to see how the mountain can support such a population. But every priest has to develop his own way to grapple with the loneliness. I think sometimes that's what the story of Jacob and the angel is about, myself. I don't want to scare you off about this, but I do want to be honest. For every additional grace a priest is granted by virtue of his vocation there is a price to pay, is what I am trying to say. But then I have only been a priest for 10 years. I often think only a priest with 50 years of experience can say anything true about being a priest. Although interestingly it's the oldest priests who are usually the ones who smile and say they don't have anything wise to say about being a priest. Humility is the final frontier for us all, as a friend of mine says. Not even Jesus thought He was cool, as he says. Something to remember. You guys hungry?

The other moment was in Yonkers, at the ice-cream shop, when we got back in Father Paul's car, and we all sat for a moment working on our cones, and making sure they didn't drip on the pristine interior of the parish Buick. It was late afternoon and it had been a hot day and we had rolled down all the windows. Father Paul had taken off his jacket and rolled up his sleeves and he was happily working on a strawberry cone. You could tell he was

genuinely pleased about the Mets and his ice-cream cone and the way the river was glinting with sailboats. Just for a second you could see that he was a regular guy who couldn't *believe* that the Mets who had been so comically awful for seven years since they were born as essentially a joke were about to win the National League pennant by eight games, beating all those old famous teams, and that he absolutely loved strawberry ice cream from a place that made it fresh themselves, and that he loved driving along the river and talking about bears. You could tell that he actually liked driving guys up to the seminary and back and that while he vaguely hoped one of us might have the itch he knew it was unlikely and he wasn't overly disappointed that he was zero for five with this group. You could see that he actually liked being a priest, and that to him it was a cool thing to be, but he didn't think it made him holier or more important than anyone else. You got a sense that he was priest because he wanted to try to reach some deep thing that he couldn't explain, a thing that he could only get at by saying yes to a job that was rewarding in some ways and really hard in some other ways.

On our way through the Bronx one of us said something about the Yankees, who played in the Bronx, and Father Paul laughed and said, The poor Yankees are going to finish about 30 games behind the Orioles this year, boys. In fact even the Senators are going to finish ahead of the Yankees. There are *college* teams that are better than the Yankees this year. This is a great year. I cast no aspersions on Yankee fans, because it would be wrong to revel in the bitter disappointment of your fellow beings, but we *can* certainly enjoy the rare treat of a great year for the Mets, and this beautiful afternoon in New York, and the fact that there is strawberry ice cream in this world. I'd stop for more ice cream, because there's a miraculous gelato shop in Queens, but I promised your parents we would be home by dark, and so we will, boys, so we will. ■

Brian Doyle is the editor of Portland Magazine at the University of Portland (Oregon) and the author most recently of A Book of Uncommon Prayer: 100 Celebrations of the Miracle and Muddle of the Ordinary.

SOJOURNERS

INTERNS

ADVOCACY. POLICY. ORGANIZING.
MEDIA. DEVELOPMENT. WRITE.
VOLUNTEER. MARKETING. SALES.
ADMINISTRATION. LEARN.
EDIT. ADVERTISING. WORK.
GROW. CHANGE.

There is more than one way to serve God. Find yours.



Every fall a new group of women and men join the ministry of Sojourners in Washington, D.C. For a year they work together, live together, and grow together. And their lives are changed. They are Sojourners interns.

Join us in 2015! Applications available at www.sojo.net/interns or by calling 1-800-714-7474. Deadline for applications for the 2015-16 intern year is **March 1, 2015.**

sojourners
www.sojo.net

The Public Private Life of Thomas Merton

100 years after his birth, the postmodern sensibilities of this Catholic author and monk keep new generations coming back for more.

IN OCTOBER 1968, the renowned Trappist monk and spiritual writer Thomas Merton set out for Asia on what would be his final pilgrimage, desiring “to drink from [the] ancient sources of monastic vision and experience.” From his monastery in Kentucky, he had long dreamed of meeting with Buddhist teachers face to face, close to the sources of Eastern mysticism, and fulfilling what he believed to be the vocation of every Christian: to be an instrument of unity.

Three times during his journey Merton met with the young Dalai Lama, who would later say, “This was the first time that I had been struck by such a feeling of spirituality in anyone who professed Christianity. ... It was Merton who introduced me to the real meaning of the word ‘Christian.’”

After Merton’s sudden death in Bangkok on Dec. 10, 1968—the result of an accidental electrocution—his body was returned to the U.S. in a military transport plane that carried the bodies of soldiers killed in Vietnam, a war he had condemned forcefully. His body was laid in the earth on a hillside behind the monastery, overlooking the Kentucky woods where he lived as a hermit the last years of his life. Pilgrims from

all over the world continue to visit the Abbey of Gethsemani and pray before the simple white cross that marks Merton’s grave. Why? One hundred years after his birth, the question is well worth asking. What particular magic draws seekers of every generation and of such remarkably diverse backgrounds to Thomas Merton?

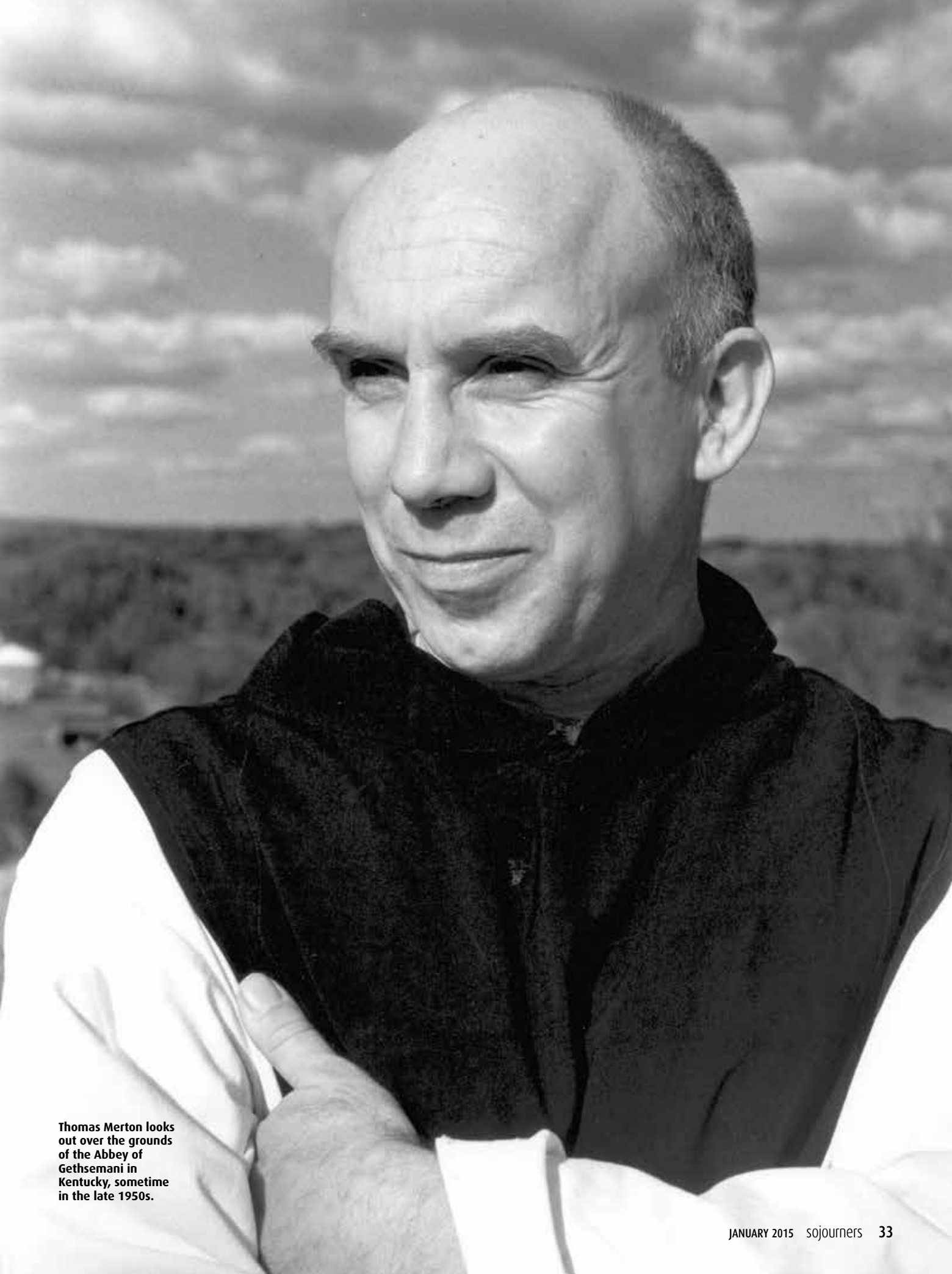
Son of a Century

Merton’s appeal to postmodern sensibilities may be explained in part by his own renaissance background. Born in France in 1915 to an American mother and an Australian father, itinerant artists who had met in Paris, Merton spent much of his youth traveling between Europe and America. By age 16, both of his parents were dead. He enrolled at Cambridge, but his raucous behavior there quickly prompted his American godfather to bring Merton back to the U.S., where he enrolled at Columbia University and soon thrived among an avant-garde group of friends.

More and more he found himself drawn to Catholic authors, devouring works by William Blake, Gerard Manley Hopkins, James Joyce, and Jacques Maritain. As he later described this period, something deep “began to stir within me ... began to

What particular magic draws seekers of every generation and of such remarkably diverse backgrounds to Merton?

Photo by Sibylle Akers



Thomas Merton looks out over the grounds of the Abbey of Gethsemani in Kentucky, sometime in the late 1950s.

push me, to prompt me ... like a voice." To the shock of his friends, Merton announced his desire to become a Roman Catholic and was baptized on Nov. 16, 1938, in New York. Two years later Merton began teaching English at St. Bonaventure. After spending Holy Week of 1941 on retreat at the Abbey of Gethsemani in the hills of rural western Kentucky, Merton decided to become a Trappist monk, part of a Catholic religious order of cloistered contemplatives who follow the 1,500-year-old Rule of St. Benedict.

It was the publication in 1948 of his autobiography, *The Seven Storey Mountain*, set against the shadow of World War II, that established Merton as a "famous" monk and a wholly unexpected literary phenomenon. In addition to publishing spiritual meditations, journals, and poetry, during the 1960s he published penetrating essays in both religious and secular venues on the most explosive social issues of the day, the religions of the East, monastic and church reform, and questions of belief and atheism.

As a model for Christian holiness, Merton was far from perfect. In fact he took pains to distance himself from his early, more pious writings, and insisted on his right not to be turned into a myth for Catholic school children. He was a restless monk, and often chafed against his vows of stability and obedience. In 1966, during a hospital stay in Louisville, Ky., he fell in love with a young student nurse, and for some six months they had a kind of clandestine affair. With considerable anguish Merton finally broke it off, though the relationship was clearly transformative, reshaping his understanding and experience of God. Indeed, what emerges from the broad tapestry of Merton's life is a beautifully *human* journey before God, an embodied spirituality that is both mystical and prophetic, offering a rare model for reconciling two strands in the Christian

tradition still commonly assumed to be opposed and even mutually exclusive.

Everywhere Haunted by God

Perhaps the simplest and most direct explanation of Merton's enduring appeal can be borrowed from a description of St. Benedict, his monastic forebear: "He was a God-oriented man leading like-minded people on the way of the gospel." As Emeritus Archbishop of Canterbury Rowan Williams writes, "The

**"It was Merton,"
the Dalai Lama said,
"who introduced me
to the real meaning
of the word
'Christian.'"**

eschaton, or the "last things"—that fertile paradox in Christian life between our pilgrimage in history now, on this side of death, and our hope for an all-embracing fulfillment yet to come. Among Merton's most celebrated passages, it would be hard to find a single one

that did not reflect that tensive insertion in the boundary between present and future. One of the most luminous passages in Merton's corpus is the oft-cited "epiphany" in Louisville, Ky., on March 18, 1958:

"In Louisville, at the corner of Fourth and Walnut, in the center of the shopping district, I was suddenly overwhelmed with the realization that I loved all those people, that they were mine and I theirs, that we could not be alien to one another even though we were total strangers," Merton wrote. "This sense of liberation from an illusory difference was such a relief and such a joy to me that I almost laughed out loud."

Up to this point Merton had viewed his vocation as a "flight

from the world," setting him apart in a kind of separate, holy existence from the masses of humanity. Here he was discovering the lightning flash of God in the stranger, the worldly "other," once alien and even threatening to his monastic vocation. The key to this epiphany of human life as the life story of God, as Merton discovered, is love, the highest expression of spirituality and freedom. Love "is the work not of states, not of organizations, not of institutions, but of persons."

Help Along the Way

For many U.S. Catholics of the pre-Vatican II era, it was *The Seven Storey Mountain* that



great Christian is the man or woman who can make me more interested in God than in him or her." Merton is a great Christian, suggests Williams, because he "will not let me look at him for long: he will, finally, persuade me to look in the direction he is looking," toward a world and a diverse human family everywhere haunted by God. To be "bitten by Merton" is to be initiated into a world of revelation, heightened expectation, and Presence. In a world crippled by violence, made weary and despairing by "the politics of the self-enclosed world," this is no small gift.

Everywhere his writings are suffused with an eschatological sensibility—from

One would be hard-pressed to name a 20th-century Christian who sought after the vocation to unity and peace more tenaciously, publicly, and prophetically than Merton.

"But protest is a biological necessity."

The Hidden Ground of Love

One would be hard-pressed to name a 20th-century Christian who sought after the vocation to unity and peace more tenaciously, publicly, and prophetically than Merton.

Is it misguided, finally, to suggest that the contours of a single person's life may serve as a trustworthy window into the life story of God? Not the least. The lives of the prophets, mystics, and saints reveal that this has always been the case. "Contrary to what has been thought in recent centuries in the West," Merton writes, "the spiritual or interior life is not an exclusively private affair. ... The spiritual life of one person is simply the life of all manifesting itself in him." This beautiful—and often terrible—insight holds for the prophets and saints just as it holds for all of us. And yet in Merton, life, spirituality, and theology seem to spark and ignite with disarming intensity. One need not resort to hagiography to celebrate such a witness to the possibilities of Presence, the hidden ground of Love, who hides in all things.

"Like each of us, Merton was flawed," poet Susan McCaslin observes. But what matters "is the constant evolution of both his life and his work—the always surging, expanding presence. The way he makes a gift of his own fragility gives us hope that each of us, with our own finitudes, flaws, and failures, may also touch holy ground. He's not removed from us, but a brother."

One hundred years after his birth and almost 50 years after his death, Merton still walks beside us as a brother. Merton was a friend of God who has led innumerable pilgrims on the way of the gospel. Perhaps he will accompany still another generation in the same way. ■

Christopher Pramuk, author of *At Play in Creation: Merton's Awakening to the Feminine Divine* (Liturgical Press), teaches at Xavier University in Cincinnati and serves on the board of the International Thomas Merton Society.

marked a pivotal signpost or even a major turning point in their life journeys. For many more, in both the Catholic and Protestant communities, it was Merton's witness to ecumenical and interfaith dialogue during the 1950s and 1960s, well ahead of the ecumenical movement harbingered by Vatican II.

Jesuit Father Daniel Berrigan remembers Merton's critical role as "pastor to the peace movement" in those difficult years. "It was a long, hard road, and we needed help along the way, and he gave it. He was very important to all of us." That sentiment may be truer today than it was five decades ago. Merton's *Peace in the Post-Christian Era*, published posthumously in 2004, but censored by his Trappist superiors in 1962 at the height of the Cold War, remains a tour de force of prophecy fired with mysticism, a field manual by which the church today might gauge the adequacy of its own response to a world engineered for war.

The same can be said of Merton's writings on race. An elderly African-American woman and former nun in my parish told me that Merton's *Conjectures of a Guilty Bystander* was her "bible" during the 1960s, when she was an activist

for racial justice and felt alienated by her religious community. "Merton got it," she said to me, with pained remembrance on her face, "when few others did." As a cloistered monk living in a monastery in rural Kentucky, Merton was about as distant geographically from the race crisis in urban America as one could be. But Merton's deep sensitivity to the situation of African Americans during the 1960s was rooted not in geographical proximity so much as basic human empathy, a radical openness to the life-worlds of others. "Most of us," he wrote in 1964, "are congenitally unable to think black, and yet that is precisely what we must do before we can hope to understand

the crisis in which we find ourselves."

What would it mean for whites in America today to "think black"? Fifty years ago, the face of racial animosity was epitomized in openly racist organizations like the Ku Klux Klan and in men like Bull Connor, the bigoted public safety commissioner of Birmingham, Ala. Then it was quite clear what racial hatred meant: It meant to will the nonexistence of black people, to seek their erasure. Merton's poem "And the Children of

Birmingham" is a powerful lament for this kind of race hatred; so also his "Picture of a Black Child with a White Doll," an elegy for Denise McNair, one of the four children killed in the Birmingham church bombing.

Today racial animosity manifests much more subtly, though its effects are no less oppressive or potentially violent. In the decades since the civil rights movement, racism's implicit strategy has not been the erasure of the feared and marginal other (i.e.

young black men) so much as their *eclipse* from meaningful participation in society. To eclipse is to ignore, to refuse to deal with a person *as a person*, as a child of God who matters. To eclipse is to blot out the light.

In his 1961 "Letter to a White Liberal," Merton confronted his readers with a very basic question: "How, then, do we treat this other Christ, this person, who happens to be black?" Of course in doing so he angered a great many of his white Christian readers. Yet he chose to speak, knowing he was wading into dangerous waters. "I ought to learn to just shut up and go about my business of thinking and breathing under trees," he wrote in 1967.



Shylye Alers

"It's important that we
bring God's presence
where violence has
occurred."



Grace-Filled Moments

With gun violence on the rise in Indianapolis, local churches are responding with prayer and a ministry of presence.

ON A COOL, windy October evening, the family of 23-year-old Dominic Amey Jr. stands outside and waits. They're waiting for someone to tell them how and why Amey, a father of three, was shot and killed behind the house a week before.



Dominic Amey Jr., father of three, was gunned down at age 23.

So they pray and they wait. But there aren't any answers—at least none that night.

Joe Zelenka, a 74-year-old Catholic, wishes he had answers, but instead he offers the family what he has: prayers for peace and healing.

Zelenka has done this many times (probably too many times, if you ask him)

since he began coordinating the Church Federation of Greater Indianapolis' prayer vigils for homicide victims—many killed by gun violence—nearly 11 years ago. At every vigil, standing at the scene of the crime, Zelenka reads scripture, offers a prayer, and then invites those present to pray aloud if they so choose.

"I think it's important that we bring God's presence where violence has occurred," he said. The vigils pre-date Zelenka's tenure with the Church Federation—he's the fourth person to hold the position of vigil coordinator since January 1996, when the Church Federation began holding a prayer vigil at the site of every violent homicide in the greater Indianapolis area.

Family photo

Getty Images

The federation's goal is peace and reconciliation, and to that end Zelenka will hold another service—this time for the person who shot Amey. It's important, the federation believes, to pray for both the offender and the offended. It can be demanding work, particularly in a city where homicides have dramatically increased in the last few years. But Zelenka said the work is worth it when he witnesses the faith and resilience of the victims' families.

"The rewarding part is to realize that there are families who want to forgive the perpetrator," he said. "Families will stand at this prayer vigil where their loved one was killed, and they will pray that the perpetrator may find God somewhere along the line."

ANGELIQUE WALKER-SMITH remembers a time when the Church Federation could make it out to each new homicide site within 48 to 72 hours. But today, she said, that immediacy would be impossible.

"Now it's just hundreds of families," she said, "and because of the increased violence and perversions of how violence is being expressed, the federation has been doing the vigils when the families are ready."

For 19 years, Walker-Smith was the executive director of the Church Federation of Greater Indianapolis, taking over right before the prayer vigils began. The vigils started in response to strained racial relations in Indianapolis 20 years ago, specifically the rioting that took place in July 1995 after a black man was beaten while in police custody. Walker-Smith said the demonstrations exposed racial and economic tensions that had long been bubbling underneath the city's surface.

"The young people involved were concerned about their circumstances," Walker-Smith said, noting that the protests took place in a central Indianapolis neighborhood where the black-white divide, not to mention the division of classes, was blatantly obvious. "There were a lot of concerns about increased violence, gangs, and the different things that you would find in impoverished communities."

In the aftermath of the riots, the ecumenical Church Federation and the neighborhood churches that were a part of it decided to do more to address the needs of the young people, to bring the "cause of Christ to the streets,"

as Walker-Smith puts it. As the faith leaders listened and realized that increased violence was indeed an issue, they committed to offer a healing presence at every site of violence.

And the prayer vigils were born.

For more than 100 years, the federation has sought to address the needs of the local community and to foster unity. Now, in addition to the prayer vigils, the group hosts forums to help residents better understand the city's growing Latino community, provides mentors for incarcerated men, and

The Hoosier gun culture openly mocks attempts to regulate the sale of firearms.

offers grants to faith-based programs and organizations.

Today Walker-Smith is the associate for national engagement of African-American churches at Bread for the World in Washington, D.C., but she keeps abreast of the situation in Indianapolis. And to be honest, it would almost be difficult not to.

Criminal homicides are on the uptick in Indianapolis—so much so that the city's violence has made national headlines. For instance, in February 2014 Indianapolis was in the news when seven people were shot to death within a span of eight hours. Five months later, Indianapolis made the national news again when, in a single weekend and within five miles of each other, a police officer was killed in a gunfight and seven people were fatally shot in a bar district.

For the past seven years, the homicide rate in Indianapolis has steadily increased, reaching an all-time high in 2013 with 153 homicides. In spring 2014, the rate of homicide in Indianapolis outpaced that of Chicago, a city recently given the dubious honor of "murder capital" of the U.S. by the FBI.

Most of the recent deaths have been gun-related and a number of them gang-related. The Indianapolis Metropolitan Police Department estimates that nearly 400 street gangs operate in the city; reciprocal gang activity was responsible for much of the record-breaking violence in 2013. Most of the victims have been young, black males. In fact, of the more than 1,120 homicides that have taken place in Indianapolis since 2006, 63 percent of the victims have been black and

82 percent of them have been male. About half of the victims were between the ages of 11 and 30 when they were killed.

THE VIOLENCE HAS become so pervasive that in spring 2014 Indianapolis Mayor Greg Ballard—a Republican elected, in part, on public safety—launched a citywide initiative to stem crime in black communities. In many ways mirroring President Obama's "Brother's Keeper" initiative, Ballard's "Your Life Matters" program addresses crime by

focusing on systemic issues such as poverty, education, and a penal system that often fails to adequately reorient formerly incarcerated people for re-entry into civilian life.

"The mayor believes we need to have a holistic approach to making our community safer," Marc Lotter, a spokesperson for the mayor's office, told *Sojourners*. "The crime that many of our cities, including Indianapolis, are seeing in recent years is really a failure of society over the last 40 years to deal with many of the issues that lead to poverty, lack of education, lack of opportunity, and lack of hope for people in our communities, particularly young men of color."

Ballard has committed \$75,000 to parenting assistance, and Lotter said improving mentorship programs is also high on the mayor's agenda.

"We can't just talk about this as a police issue," Lotter said. "If we never get at the underlying cause, it makes us susceptible to having these spikes [of crime]—these increases from time to time."

Meanwhile, the Church Federation of Greater Indianapolis has continued with its prayer vigils, even as they become more and more frequent. Lotter said it would be impossible to pinpoint a single issue that has led to increased gun violence in Indianapolis, but Joe Zelenka disagrees.

"It's too easy to get a gun anymore," he said bluntly.

And he's not the only one who thinks so.

Illinois journalists with WGN-TV recently went undercover to find out why more than 3,800 guns confiscated from

Chicago gang members had been purchased in Indiana. What they found was a Hoosier gun culture that openly mocks attempts to regulate the sale of firearms, coupled with lax oversight and cheap prices. All this has made Indianapolis a hub for those seeking easy access to guns.

According to the WGN report, the dealers at an Indianapolis gun show joked with the undercover producer and photographer. "It's so easy here," one dealer bragged. "We deal with Illinois residents all the time, and we invite them to come to Indiana."

In terms of gun laws, Indiana is one of only 13 states that require a permit or license in order for a handgun to be carried in plain sight. Only the District of Columbia and six states—California, Florida, Illinois, New York, South Carolina, and Texas—are more stringent, prohibiting open carry of handguns.

In 2011, however, Indiana passed a law allowing people to carry a handgun without a license under several conditions: if they are on their own property, at a shooting range for instruction, or during legal hunting. People are also allowed to carry a handgun, license-free, either on their person or in their vehicle, as long as the gun is unloaded and securely wrapped.

Additionally, in March 2014 the state legislature passed a law—lauded by the National Rifle Association—that allows adults to bring guns on school property, provided that the weapons remain locked inside of a vehicle.

Zelenka said he's not sure how to fix the issue; he just knows that guns in Indianapolis are the issue. He estimates that at least half of the vigils he does are for gun-related deaths—it's probably a low estimate given that, at the time of this writing, almost 83 percent of homicides in 2014 were shooting deaths.

Zelenka, a devout Catholic, said that the prayer vigils are his ministry, calling them a "grace-filled" moment. And he'll keep doing the vigils as long as they are necessary.

"I really feel for the families that have lost a loved one," he said. "I don't know what else to say other than to convince them not to despair but to live with the hope that God is on their side." ■

Dawn Cherie Araujo, a former Sojourners editorial assistant, is a staff writer for the Global Sisters Report in Kansas City, Mo.

A 2015 Wall Calendar For Cat Lovers & Peace Activists

Cat Lovers Against the Bomb

Keep
Your
Eye
On
The
Prize:
2015
Peace



\$99.95 + \$2.00 Shipping (USA) • VISA/MC/DISC

Order By Phone: 877.778.3434 (Toll Free)

By Mail: CLAB-SOJO

P.O. Box 83466

Lincoln, NE 68501-3466



©2014 Nebraskans For Peace.

Printed in U.S.A. Catcal@aol.com

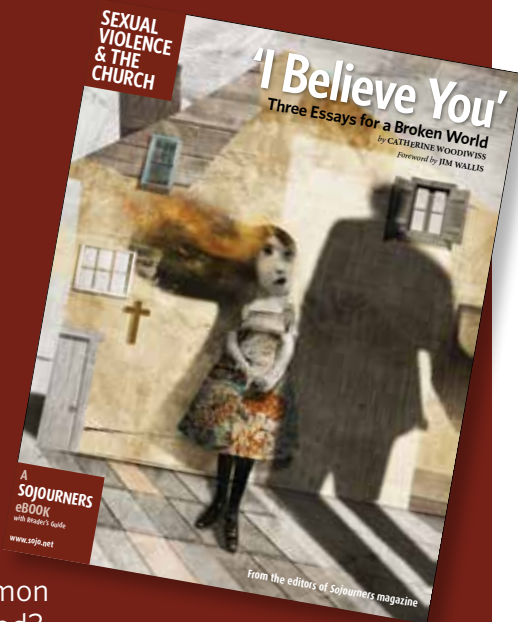
eBOOK FROM SOJOURNERS!

Perfect for small groups or individual study!

I BELIEVE YOU: Sexual Violence and the Church

Designed to spark discussion, break the silence, and expose the truth about sexual violence and the church.

Whether you have experienced sexual violence or know someone who has, a common question is: Where was God?



Only \$2.99 on

amazonkindle

sojourners
www.soj.net



Trappist monk and
contemplative writer
Thomas Merton, in
silhouette, at the
Abbey in Gethsemani
in Kentucky.

Merton had
multiple “vocations”:
monk and writer,
contemplative
and social critic, ecu-
menist and prophet.

By Patrick F. O’Connell

Wisdom and **Discontent**

Diverse books mark the 100th birthday of the great mystic and writer
Thomas Merton.

WHILE NOT HERE in person for the celebration of his 100 birthday on Jan. 31, Thomas Merton is certainly present in spirit through the extraordinary number of volumes about and even by him being issued to mark the anniversary—a splendid opportunity for readers to acquaint or reacquaint themselves with the monk often considered the most significant American Catholic writer of the past century.

Perhaps the best place to start is *Messengers of Hope: Reflections in Honor of Thomas Merton*, edited by Gray Henry and Jonathan Montaldo (Fons Vitae), a collection of more than 100 reflections by monks and activists, scholars, filmmakers, and poets, and Christian, Jewish, and Buddhist practitioners on the significance of Merton for their own lives. Some of the contributors are well known—Joan Chittister, John Dear, Jim Forest, James Martin, Richard Rohr, Huston Smith; others are well known in Merton circles; some are younger voices who one day may become well known but already have valuable insights as to how Merton continues to speak to the needs and hopes of the contemporary world. This is a rich compendium of personal stories that is a delight to dip into or to read straight through.

More of Merton’s own writing is being made available in connection with the centenary.

Ralph Eugene Meatyard

42 Stained Souls

Danny Duncan Collum on the internet's toxic waste dump

44 Reviving the Flame

Ryan Herring reviews *Black Prophetic Fire*

45 Staying Connected in Later Years

Julienne Gage on *With a Little Help from Our Friends*

46 When Histories Compete

Scott Schaeffer-Duffy on *Contested Land, Contested Memory*

In the Valley of Wormwood, edited by Patrick Hart (Cistercian), a collection of 74 biographical sketches of 12th- and 13th-century Cistercians, is Merton's earliest prose work, and it was recently published for the first time. Definitely a product of Merton's first monastic years, still marked by the enthusiasm of the "honeymoon" phase of his religious life, this is not "major" Merton, but like virtually everything he wrote, the brief biographies are eminently readable, with revealing details and piquant anecdotes that make the subjects come alive. The work provides evidence of Merton's immersion in his Cistercian tradition at the very outset of his monastic life, and so is a significant resource for understanding his complex and evolving relationship to his order, but it also serves as a revealing window on many fascinating figures.

Another new Merton work of a far different kind is *The Letters of Thomas Merton and Victor and Carolyn Hammer: Ad Majorem Dei Gloriam*, edited by F. Douglas Scutchfield and Paul Evans Holbrook (University Press of Kentucky), the complete epistolary record of one of Merton's closest friendships, with the Viennese-born artist and printer Victor Hammer and his wife, Carolyn. The volume provides valuable details about numerous projects Merton and Victor Hammer worked on together, including the various limited-edition works Hammer produced on his hand press, particularly Merton's great prose-poem "Hagia Sophia," inspired by a Hammer painting, as well as the many books supplied to Merton by Carolyn Hammer from the University of Kentucky Library where she worked. But above all it is a record of the deep mutual affection that Merton and the couple shared through their letters and occasional visits.

Still to come in this anniversary year are the collected correspondence of Merton with his principal editor Robert Giroux, edited by Patrick Samway (Notre Dame); *Thomas Merton and the Noonday Demon: The Camaldoli Correspondence* (Wipf & Stock), editor Donald Grayston's record of Merton's recurrent urge to transfer to a more solitary

religious order; *Early Essays—1947-1952* (Cistercian), a dozen articles, most of them never reprinted, from a key transitional period in his monastic life (a kind of "prequel" to his *Selected Essays*, recently issued by Orbis in paperback); and *Charter, Customs, and Constitutions of the Cistercians* (Cistercian), the seventh of a projected 12 volumes of Merton's monastic conferences (these latter edited by the present reviewer).

For those looking for an overview of Merton's life and work, a pair of short volumes complement one another. *Thomas Merton: Faithful Visionary* (Liturgical) by

Michael W. Higgins provides a fast-paced, engaging, and at times provocative narrative of Merton's restless early life and conversion to Catholicism, his decision to join one of the church's most austere monastic orders, his emergence as a major writer with the 1948 publication of his best-selling autobiography *The Seven Storey Mountain*, and his subsequent development as an influential proponent of the contemplative dimension of

Christian life, of prophetic witness against war, racial injustice, and political oppression, and of the need for dialogue and mutual respect among members of the world's religious traditions. While aimed at the general reader, the inclusion of numerous excerpts from Higgins' interviews of Merton friends and scholars over the years, not otherwise available, is an attractive feature of the book that makes it worth reading as well by those already familiar with the details of the Merton story.

While Higgins concentrates on Merton's life, Linus Mundy in *Simply Merton: Wisdom from His Journals* (Franciscan) focuses on 15 key themes of Merton's writing (drawing mainly but not exclusively—despite the subtitle—from the seven volumes of Merton's journal), such as simplicity, non-violence, silence and solitude, death, and eternity. Each chapter includes an overview of the theme, brief excerpts on the topic from Merton's writings, and the author's own reflections, often drawn from his visits to the

Continued on Page 43



New & Noteworthy



TRUTH AND SATIRE

The witty film satire *Dear White People* is a comic entry point into a serious, much-needed conversation about race relations on college campuses. The storylines of four African-American students at a prestigious university spotlight a culture of racism that is easily and dangerously concealed by academia's progressive posture. dearwhitepeoplemovie.com

FOLK EXTRAVAGANZA

The album *Another Day, Another Time: Celebrating the Music of "Inside Llewyn Davis,"* recorded at a 2013 concert, features Punch Brothers, Joan Baez, The Avett Brothers, Gillian Welch, and others. The 34 tracks include a whiskey anthem and a classic hymn, a Vietnam War protest song and a farewell lament. Nonesuch

WELL VERSED

In *Disquiet Time: Rants and Reflections on the Good Book by the Skeptical, the Faithful, and a Few Scoundrels*, edited by Jennifer Grant and Cathleen Falsani, more than 40 contributors offer personal essays on the Bible passages that challenge, confound, or delight them. Jericho Books

MAKING FOOD FAIR

Those who feed America can't always afford to feed their families, but they're working to change that. The documentary *Food Chains* follows the lives of farm laborers, an invaluable and abused segment of our population, as they fight for fair wages by going straight to the top offenders: supermarkets. foodchainsfilm.com

The Internet's Toxic Waste Dump

BY NOW MOST of us know that when we use the internet, we are giving up privacy and exposing ourselves to potential surveillance and fraud. But we probably didn't know until recently that in poor and distant lands, souls are being stained and scarred for the sake of our internet browsing experience.

There's an old saying that nobody really wants to know the details of making sausage or passing legislation. Now there's an update: You really don't want to know how—in a world peopled by thousands of internet-capable sickos, murderers, perverts, and fanatics—your social media feeds remain so remarkably free of beheadings, snuff videos, and child porn.

Like me, if you ever thought about that, you perhaps assumed that some miraculous algorithm



Wired.com on Oct. 23, 2014, Adrian Chen reports that more than 100,000 human beings are employed in the business of internet “content moderation”—viewing and deleting offensive material that users have attempted to post to social networks. That's twice as many as the total number of employees at Google and 14 times the number at Facebook.

This huge sector of the high-tech world is unknown and invisible to us in part because much of the work is done in the Philippines where, for salaries of \$300 to \$500 per month, young college graduates spend their entire eight-hour shifts in a cubicle screening social media posts and deleting the ones that violate a site's policies. As Chen writes, they “soak up the worst of humanity in order to protect the rest of us.”

The Philippines was chosen as the place to filter our filth for the same reason that other countries end up with our physical toxic waste—because many of their people are poor and desperate for employment. The Filipinos are also favored because they are

familiar with the English language and U.S. culture owing to a “special relationship” that goes back to our conquest of the islands in 1898.

The moderators are employed by companies that specialize in content moderation and contract with the internet giants to do their dirty work. Chen visited a site outside Manila where workers for a company called TaskUs were doing real-time screening for Whisper, a fast-growing new, anonymous mobile messaging service. A white board at the

Gary Waters

front of the room bore a list of the items the moderators were seeking: “pornography, gore, minors, sexual solicitation, sexual body parts/images, racism.”

Before the piece on Wired.com, there had been no reporting on the content-moderation industry. But now we know what happens, and we can't un-know it any more than the people who do the moderating can ever completely forget the horrible things they see. The company Chen visited employs a psychologist to screen and counsel the workers. She says that the effect on the moderators from their constant exposure to degrading images is “like PTSD. There is a memory trace in their minds.” Chen interviewed a moderator who reports being still haunted by watching one minute of a half-hour video of sexual torture. “I watched that a long time ago,” she said, “but it's like I just watched it yesterday.” ■

Danny Duncan Collum teaches writing at Kentucky State University in Frankfort. He is the author of the novel *White Boy*.

Souls are being stained and scarred to keep your internet experience relatively clean.

was automatically filtering all the bad stuff. Well, think again.

In the early days of the internet, porn sites occasionally popped up in the course of ordinary, innocent internet use. But search engine filters and various parental control programs seem, to my experience, to have made that a thing of the past. Today, every evil and dehumanizing image and act under the sun is still out there somewhere on the internet, and we are all much more connected to one another than ever before—yet, for the most part, you have to go looking for the dark side.

But keeping your internet experience relatively clean doesn't happen by magic. In an article posted on



Continued from Page 41

Abbey of Gethsemani over the past 30 years and his conversations with the monks about Merton, monasticism, prayer, and practice. The title captures the tone nicely—Merton without a lot of extra frills, accessible to any interested reader, simple without being simplistic.

A more whole-dress treatment of the full range of Merton's work is provided in *Divine Discontent: The Prophetic Voice of Thomas Merton* (Bloombury) by John Moses, former dean of London's St. Paul's Cathedral. Moses provides a comprehensive survey of what he considers Merton's multiple "vocations"—sometimes conflicting but ultimately complementary—as monk and writer, contemplative and social critic, ecumenist and prophet. The "discontent" of the title refers to Merton's endemic restlessness, his ongoing dissatisfactions with himself, his monastery and religious order, his church and his country, that were both evidence of his own

Even after becoming a Cistercian, Merton referred to Francis as his favorite saint.

limitations, struggles, and flaws and ultimately, in the author's view, signs of and goads to wholehearted commitment to the reign of God, to love for the Creator and all creation. Merton's imperfect but deeply committed humanity, his dedication to realizing the true self in his own life and to recognizing and nurturing that true self in others, is the thread that knits together his "vocations" for Moses.

Along with these wide-angle treatments are numerous new studies of particular aspects of Merton's vision that speak to the present day. Daniel P. Horan's *The Franciscan Heart of Thomas Merton* (Ave Maria) examines the early and continuing influence of the Franciscan tradition on Merton's life and thought. Even after becoming a Cistercian, Merton referred to Francis as his favorite saint and continued to draw on Francis and his followers such as Bonaventure and Duns Scotus for insights from Christology to ecology, from peacemaking to interreligious dialogue, from



Transgender actor Alexandra Billings, right, with Transparent co-star Jeffrey Tambor.

A BETTER KIND OF GOOD

TOOTSIE, the 1982 Dustin Hoffman comedy in which a failing actor cross-dresses to win a part on a soap opera, is a lovely, problematic film (and just released in an excellent home edition from www.criterion.com). It's controversial in some quarters for playing the idea of a man dressing as a woman for laughs: The joke is on any male-bodied person who challenges macho stereotypes. As when *The Da Vinci Code* attracted criticism for portraying a character with albinism as an insane assassin, like almost every other comparable movie has treated albinism, *Tootsie* represents a time when the extent of mainstream cinema's engagement with what it thought constituted "trans" was to portray cross-dressing for laughs. But a cisgender straight character dressing up has little or nothing to do with the real stories of the "T" in LGBTQ.

Cinematic LGBTQ characters seem to evolve one step forward and a half back—beginning with their invisibility, then moving through psychopathy (the "evil queer" of Hitchcock's *Rope* still shows up in *The Lion King* and *The Avengers*); martyrdom (*Kiss of the Spiderwoman*, *Philadelphia*, *Brokeback Mountain*); safe best friends (*The Prince of Tides* and *My Best Friend's Wedding*); and eventually redemption (*Milk*, the wonderful recent *Pride*). The evolution continues: George Carlin's gay best friend caricature in *The Prince of Tides* was in good faith, but would not pass muster today. We're shaking off the idea that LGBTQ characters

can only be suffering or sassy.

One of those shakes is the remarkable series **Transparent**, in which Jeffrey Tambor reinvents himself as a transgender woman coming out. There's gorgeous writing and performances and engagement with the community whose story is being explored. (In another sign that no longer can LGBTQ stories only be told by straight people, the transgender actor Alexandra Billings co-stars as an emotionally integrated person rather than comic foil or suicidal drama queen.)

The problem with *Tootsie* is obvious—it's a story in which anything that challenges traditional masculinity is treated as a joke. But at least Hoffman's character experiences one gift of queer theology: How to become a better person through imagining the experience of people subject to gender or sexual prejudice.

Tootsie is still hugely entertaining (Charles Durning's good-hearted suitor and Teri Garr's long-suffering crony stand out in particular), just as *Brokeback Mountain* is an artfully realized drama that surely helped change public attitudes. The perfect shouldn't be the enemy of the good. But a better kind of good is when people get to participate in telling their own stories and bearing their own gifts, rather than relying on (or being co-opted by) the well-meaning or Oscar-hungry. ■

Gareth Higgins is a northern Irish writer living in North Carolina. He co-presents thefilmtalk.com and soulelegram.com.



CELEBRATING 100 YEARS
of educating faithful and
creative leaders for
the church's ministries
in the world.

Now accepting applications for all
degree programs. Priority deadlines:

- **January 15:** Master of Divinity,
Master of Religious Leadership,
Doctor of Theology
- **February 1:** Master of
Theological Studies
- **February 15:** Master of Theology
- **March 15:** Doctor of Ministry



EMORY

CANDLER
SCHOOL OF
THEOLOGY

www.candler.emory.edu

CultureWatch

BOOKS ART MUSIC FILM

reflections on the true self to perceptions of the meaning of the Incarnation.

Developing the ideas first expressed in his magisterial study *Sophia: The Hidden Christ of Thomas Merton*, Christopher Pramuk, in his new book *At Play in Creation: Merton's Awakening to the Feminine Divine* (Liturgical), collects essays and presentations given at various conferences and retreats that focus on the centrality of wisdom—the holistic, participatory, experiential encounter with God immanent and transcendent—for Merton's vision of a redeemed world. The theological richness of Pramuk's earlier work is distilled here to reveal the pastoral and practical relevance, both challenging and consoling, of Merton's recognition of the role of divine wisdom in healing the wounds and divisions that beset the contemporary world. (See Pramuk's "The Public Private Life of Thomas Merton" on page 32.)

In addition to Gordon Oyer's excellent account of the 1964 Gethsemani peace-makers' retreat, *Pursuing the Spiritual Roots of Protest*, reviewed in the December 2014 *Sojourners*, other recent publications include Robert Inchausti's cultural commentary *Thinking through Thomas Merton: Contemplation for Contemporary Times* (SUNY Press), Jeffrey Shaw's comparative study *Illusions of Freedom: Thomas Merton and Jacques Ellul on Technology and the Human Condition* (Pickwick), and Suzanne Zuercher's sensitive reflection on Merton's brief romantic interlude, *The Ground of Love and Truth: Reflections on Thomas Merton's Relationship with the Woman Known as M.* (ACTA).

Still to come during the anniversary year are Ephrem Arcement's *In the School of Prophets: The Formation of Thomas Merton's Prophetic Spirituality* (Liturgical), John Dear's *Thomas Merton, Peacemaker* (Orbis), and *Make Peace before the Sun Goes Down*, Roger Lipsey's account of Merton's relationship with his abbot (Shambhala)—certainly a feast of words rich and nourishing enough to last an entire year of celebration and reflection. ■

Patrick F. O'Connell, co-author of *The Thomas Merton Encyclopedia*, edits *The Merton Seasonal*, the quarterly journal of the *International Thomas Merton Society*.

Reviewed by Ryan Herring

REVIVING THE FLAME

Black Prophetic Fire, by Cornel West and Christa Buschendorf. Beacon Press.

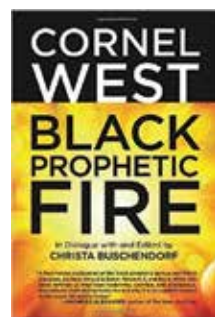
CORNEL WEST and Christa Buschendorf have collaborated to bring forth a powerful look at the visionary legacies of 19th- and 20th-century African-American leaders. *Black Prophetic Fire* consists of six conversations between West and Buschendorf, each one focusing on a different black prophetic figure: Frederick Douglass, W.E.B. Du Bois, Martin Luther King Jr., Ella Baker, Malcolm X, and Ida B. Wells. In the book, West displays his wealth of knowledge and understanding of those prominent historical black icons and their movements.

For West, U.S. society has arrived at



a pivotal point. He sees the "black embrace of the seductive myth of individualism in American culture" as reason enough to ask tough reflective questions such as, "Are we witnessing the death of black prophetic fire in our time?" and "Have we forgotten how beautiful it is to be on fire for justice?"

West is known as an intellectual and activist who loathes the unfair treatment of people anywhere, regardless of their race, gender, sexual orientation, or religious creed. His message of love, particularly for the younger generations, becomes the undertone of this book. Throughout the years, the black prophetic tradition has seen a decline in exemplars of integrity. West presents the



conversations he had with Buschendorf as a history lesson and a call to younger generations to not let this tradition fizzle out.

The black prophetic tradition has improved the conditions of the black community in the U.S. It has also served as a moral compass for an American society that has failed to live up to the promises stated in its founding documents.

The irony, for West, is that in the era of the first black president, this prophetic tradition is at its weakest. The presidency of Barack Obama “conceals the escalating levels of social misery in poor and black America.” The myth of a post-racial society and Obama’s “friendly black face” have made it particularly difficult for radical voices to be heard. Disgraceful rates of incarceration, shameful unemployment levels, and the loss of a generation’s worth of



Cornel West
and Christa
Buschendorf

wealth are the present reality for the black community, yet because of Obama’s presidency there is perceived to be significant progress for black people in the U.S.

While some might be tired of West’s critiques of President Obama, it should be noted that his criticism is consistent with that he’s had of every other president. Though West himself has never been the face of a movement, he carries on the legacy of the black prophetic tradition by courageously attacking empire, white supremacy, patriarchy, and other systems of oppression through his writing, teaching, and speaking.

In light of continuing protests in Ferguson, Mo., over the police killing of an unarmed black teenager and other controversial events, it would be a drastic mistake for black millennials to not heed West’s plea to continue on in the same vein as their ancestors. Malcolm X once said that “truth is on the side of the oppressed.” It is the

truth that comes from the ugly depths of social misery and despair that black youth must use to expose the lies perpetrated by dominant society and build something better.

The conversations in this book offer a wealth of knowledge. I am reminded of the Akan term “sankofa,” which can be

translated to mean “reach back and get it.” In other words, you must know where you have been to know where you are going. In this book, West puts this wisdom to use.

Ryan Herring, a former *Sojourners* intern, is founder and editor-in-chief of *The Ghetto Monk*.

Reviewed by Julianne Gage

STAYING CONNECTED IN LATER YEARS

***With a Little Help from Our Friends: Creating Community as We Grow Older*, by Beth Baker. Vanderbilt University Press.**

IN THE U.S.,” mention of “aging in community” might conjure up images of weathered faces in nursing homes and snowbirds in South Florida. And yet, as increasing numbers of Americans reach the golden years—and do so in an uncertain economy—so do the array of scenarios for those growing older. Award-winning journalist Beth Baker traveled across the U.S. to document the possibilities in her latest book, *With a Little Help from Our Friends: Creating Community as We Grow Older*.

Some of her findings aren’t so surprising. Baby boomers have a stronger desire for independence than did their predecessors, and they aren’t keen on being tagged “elderly.” In fact, they generally see themselves in a different cohort than those born just prior to the boom.

Whether you’re in one of the aforementioned age groups or a diligent millennial thinking way ahead, Baker shows that imagining how you’ll one day balance independence with human connection in your older years doesn’t have to be daunting.

“That we can raise this question is remarkable. Never before have older people, often through their own imagination and determination, had real options from which to choose,” she writes.

Baker describes a wide array of communities—some with walls, some without. For example, the village concept makes it easier for people to age in place by providing them with a social network. In non-profit versions, many services

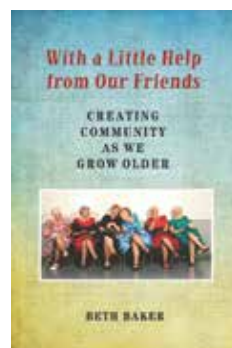
come from the aging themselves, who share volunteer duties according to their abilities. This builds relationships and fosters self-esteem as people begin to lose control of certain aspects of their life. In for-profit village programs, people pay into a local network that specializes in sending out the right professionals for things such as home attendant care, home maintenance, and other goods and services. Similar plans have been set up in Naturally Occurring Retirement Communities (NORCs), where, by some coincidence, an entire neighborhood or apartment building finds itself aging together and thus organizes services to accommodate the group’s changing needs.

There are also many options for those who want to share housing or invest in cooperatives. The most effective options, Baker notes, are the ones built around common interests and identities. In fact, she says that many of these communities are helping people find creative outlets and try new activities.

A California community created its own group of older playwrights and filmmakers. For many it was the first time they had ever

tried the arts. In the Northeast, a group of highly educated intellectuals began a movement “without walls,” wherein its members meet for plays and philosophical dinner conversations. That informal structure creates a safe place for planning and talking about the inevitable end-of-life experience.

Social activism can also be an important bond. Once a





STATEMENT OF OWNERSHIP, MANAGEMENT, AND CIRCULATION

(Required by 39 U.S.C. 3685)

1. Title of Publication: Sojourners. 2. Publication No: 0364-2097. 3. Date of filing: Oct. 03, 2014. 4. Frequency of issue: Monthly. 5. Number of issues published annually: Eleven. 6. Annual subscription price: \$39.95. 7. Location of known office of publication: 3333 14th St. NW, Suite 200, Washington, DC 20010. 8. Same. 9. Publisher—Cynthia J. Martens, 3333 14th St. NW, Suite 200, Washington, DC 20010. Editor—James D. Rice, same address. 10. Owner: Sojourners, 3333 14th St. NW, Suite 200, Washington, DC 20010. 11. Known bondholders, mortgagees, and other securities: None. 12. The purpose, function, and nonprofit status of this organization and the exempt status for federal income tax purposes have not changed during the preceding 12 months. 13. Publication title: Sojourners. 14. Issue date for circulation data below: September-October 2014. 15. Extent and nature of circulation: paid subscriptions, U.S. and international, newsstand, and single copy sales. The average number of copies of each issue during the preceding 12 months: A. Total number of copies printed (net press run)—29,889. B.1. Paid and/or requested circulation: Outside-county mail subscriptions including advertiser's proof and exchange copies—26,082. B.2. Paid in-county subscriptions—0. B.3. Sales through dealers and carriers, street vendors, counter sales, and other non-USPS paid distribution—245. B.4. Other classes mailed through the USPS—81. C. Total paid distribution—26,408. D.1. Free distribution by mail: Outside-county—0. D.2. In-county—0. D.3. Other classes mailed through the USPS—481. D.4. Free distribution outside the mail—1,582. E. Total free distribution—2,063. F. Total distribution: 28,471. G. Copies not distributed—1,418. H. Total—29,889. I. Percent paid—93%. The actual number of copies of single issue published nearest to filing date: A. 33,376. B.1. 27,786. B.2. 0. B.3. 370. B.4. 75. C. 28,231. D.1. 0. D.2. 0. D.3. 583. D.4. 2,500. E. 3,083. F. 31,314. G. 2,062. H. 33,376. I. 90%. 16. Electronic Copy Circulation: paid electronic circulation. The average of each issue during the preceding 12 months: A. Total number of electronic copies—523. B. Total paid print copies plus paid electronic copies—26,931. C. Total print distribution plus electronic copies—28,994. D. Percent paid—93%. The actual number of copies of single issue published nearest to filing date: A. 521. B. 28,752. C. 31,835. D. 90%. 17. Publication of Statement of Ownership: January 2015. 18. I certify that the statements made by me above are correct and complete. Cynthia J. Martens, Publisher.

CultureWatch

BOOKS ART MUSIC FILM

military base, the intentional community of Hope Meadows in Rantoul, Ill., has been converted into a foster community for children in the care of child protective services. Older people receive affordable housing in exchange for mentoring the kids and serving as a support to their foster families.

The drawbacks? Highly structured community living can be jarring for people who have spent decades developing a different routine, and investment in long-term living facilities don't always work out as promised. In one gay and lesbian community, virtually

all the residents complained that they bought into a facility offering a series of community dinners and social activities that never came to fruition.

The book is an excellent resource for considering where you want to live, what you'll have to live on, and what level of interaction feels comfortable and logistically necessary. It's a helpful, hopeful take on communal life even as we age. ■

Julienne Gage is a journalist based in Washington, D.C.

Reviewed by Scott Schaeffer-Duffy

WHEN HISTORIES COMPETE

Contested Land, Contested Memory: Israel's Jews and Arabs and the Ghosts of Catastrophe, by Jo Roberts. Dundurn Press.

IN 1973, IMMEDIATELY following the Yom Kippur War, I watched the movie *Exodus*. I was so swept up by Leon Uris' depiction of the Zionist struggle that I wrote in my journal, "The U.S. should do everything it can to defend the state of Israel!"

Two years later, I read a history of the Arab-Israeli conflict in a serialized encyclopedia of World War II. It transformed me into an impassioned defender of Palestinian rights. Clearly, the historical narrative one accepts is critical to determining how a conflict is understood.

Jo Roberts' book *Contested Land, Contested Memory: Israel's Jews and Arabs and the Ghosts of Catastrophe* challenges the nationalist mythologies of both Israelis and Palestinians, peoples largely in denial of each other's histories. With exhaustive research and numerous personal interviews, Roberts has created a book that is both sensitive to and challenging for partisans of either side.

Roberts begins with the story of an Israeli Jew whose memories of idyllic childhood vacations in a particular village are shattered when she learns from a Palestinian boyfriend that his family was displaced from that village by Israeli soldiers in 1948. Roberts goes on to offer a history of Zionism that is not without its share of heartbreak. From persecution in Catholic Spain to the Dreyfus affair in France and government-sanctioned pogroms in Russia, she reminds us of the prevalence and ferocity of anti-Semitism,

which led many to join the movement to create a Jewish state in Palestine. She includes a report to President Truman about 250,000 Holocaust survivors, who in late 1945 were still confined in former slave labor and concentration camps because no country, including the U.S., would accept them as refugees. Roberts makes a convincing case that many Jews went to Palestine because they literally "had nowhere else to go."

In 1948, modern Israel is born and the Palestinians displaced—700,000 as refugees, 150,000 as internally displaced people. For Israeli Jews the event is a joyful national holiday, while for Palestinians it is the "Nakba" (Catastrophe), disparate depictions contested to this day.

Roberts describes how Israelis tried to erase the memory of their country's former inhabitants by demolishing hundreds of Palestinian villages and remaking all the maps with new Hebrew names. Israeli history books recast the ethnic cleansing of most Palestinians as a voluntary departure. Meanwhile Palestinian historians dwell on their displacement and either deny or minimize the Holocaust. The disconnect between the two peoples discourages empathy.

For many peace activists, the primary causes of ongoing conflict between the Israelis and Palestinians are Israel's occupation and settlement of Palestinian and Syrian territory seized in 1967 as well as the unresolved status of Palestinian refugees from 1948. While

Short Takes

FOUR QUESTIONS FOR...

Beth Katz

Bio: Beth Katz is founder and executive director of Project Interfaith.

Website: projectinterfaith.org

Roberts acknowledges both problems, she traces the root cause of the conflict to the Zionists' original aspiration to create a Jewish and democratic state in a land whose residents were primarily not Jewish.

Israel's self-understanding as a people ever on the verge of extermination feeds its mistreatment of the Palestinians. Roberts writes, "Israeli national identity oscillates between the twin poles of the Holocaust and the Six-Day War, victim and vanquisher—the latter is the antidote to the former. Permanently vulnerable, Israel must respond to any attack with massive force." Palestinian-Israeli lawyer and journalist Marzuq Halabi agrees: "If you are afraid, and you have power, then you can be very violent, as with the Israeli occupation." By the same token, if you are traumatized by oppression, as the Palestinians are, and in denial of the other's suffering, you can be violent as well.

Thankfully, Roberts includes the voices of people who see the conflict differently. In 1921, the religious existentialist philosopher Martin Buber told the Zionist Congress that the Jewish people should announce "its desire to live in peace and brotherhood with the Arab people and to develop the common homeland into a republic in which both peoples will have the possibility of free development." Unfortunately, the Zionists pursued the creation of an ethnocracy instead, a Jewish state that negates the history and rights of other occupants, a recipe for conflict.

A small minority of Israeli historians and others have come to embrace a post-Zionist vision of Israel: a single state with equal rights for all its present and former inhabitants. They assert that the physical return of the Palestinian refugees would pose enormous problems, including a security risk for Jews. But they also recognize that acknowledging that refugees suffered an injustice that needs redress (some returning to Israel, some receiving reparations, some receiving citizenship from their host countries) would go a long way toward reconciliation.

Contested Land, Contested Memory is at once eye-opening and thoughtful, invaluable for anyone wanting to better understand the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. ■

Scott Schaeffer-Duffy is a member of the Saints Francis and Thérèse Catholic Worker in Worcester, Mass.

1. Why did you decide to launch Project Interfaith?

There are a couple experiences in my life that led me to found PI. One would be that my grandparents immigrated to this country after experiencing harsh persecution as a result of their Jewish identity.

Another would be growing up as a religious and ethnic minority and encountering a lot of people making assumptions about what that means. I didn't always feel welcome or free to be who I am. But growing up and hearing about my grandparents' experiences in other countries, I realized how lucky we are to have certain rights in this country. So I wanted to make sure people understand these rights and freedoms.



Dana Damewood

do you respond to that? True engagement with someone is messy. Differences aren't always neatly resolved in an hour, but there's a richness there. If you can talk about something as personal as religion and are able to really listen, you'll find that

people can talk about other sensitive topics, too. We have done a number of trainings and workshops for professionals, educators, and professional care providers that focus on working with diverse populations. I've learned that people want to be talking about their beliefs. It's not a question of how do we get people interested in talking about it; it's how do we help people begin to initiate these conversations.

2. What is Project Interfaith's mission and approach to interfaith work?

Our mission is to grow understanding, respect, and relationships among people of all beliefs and cultures—not to force agreement. And we don't try to make everything run through PI, but rather we create different educational resources and digital tools that people can then take and use in their own communities and contexts. Some people think we're trying to replace face-to-face gatherings with online experiences, but we're not. Rather, we use digital media as a tool to enhance what happens when people come together.

3. The idea of not forcing agreement is refreshing and unique, but not always popular. How

4. In your latest online campaign, Ravel Unravel, participants are encouraged to upload videos discussing their belief systems, as a way of dispelling stereotypes and meeting people where they are. Why this approach?

Ravel Unravel is a tool that we developed that began in the spirit of trying to empower people to bring these types of conversations and experiences to their own campuses and cities. Ravel Unravel really humanizes religious and spiritual diversity, and it feels very accessible. So if you're not ready to sit across the table from someone very different from you, watch some videos. Hopefully then people can see the incredible diversity of experiences that people bring to their communities.

—Interview by Lani Prunés and Jenna Barnett

Bright Morning Star A-Rising

IF WE FOLLOWED the church calendar and celebrated Epiphany in January, we wouldn't have to cram the wise men into the crèche to compete with the shepherds. We could save all the "Star of Bethlehem" songs to brighten the cold days of January. Obviously, the magi needed a few weeks to prepare and then travel "from the East."

A new bright object in the sky was certainly an "epiphany," but it was not totally unexpected. These magi were astrologers, the ancient astronomers of their day. To the east of Jerusalem lay Babylon, birthplace of astrology and location of a large Jewish community. The discovery of two astrological books among the Dead Sea scrolls showed that the sign of Aries the Ram in the zodiac represented the reign of Herod the Great in Judea. Since Herod was aging, it is not surprising that Jewish astrologers were watching this royal constellation.

In a television series called *Jesus: The Complete Story*, astronomer Michael R. Molnar notes an unusual astrological conjunction on the night of April 17, in 6 B.C.E., the year Jesus was most likely born. At that time, both Saturn and the sun were in the constellation Aries, and then the moon eclipsed to reveal Jupiter, king of the planets, also in Aries. Jupiter shone into the dawn, another auspicious sign of royalty. It was confirmation enough to send these astrologers on their way.

Perhaps if we celebrated Epiphany *after* Christmas, we'd have more time to learn about this epiphany and its remarkable interpretation.



Reta Halteman Finger, co-author of *Creating a Scene in Corinth: A Simulation*, taught Bible at Messiah College in Grantham, Pa., and writes a Bible study blog at www.eewc.com/RetasReflections.

[JANUARY 4]

Who Receives the Blessing?

Jeremiah 31:7-14; Psalm 147:12-20; Ephesians 1:3-14; John 1:1-18

HAS THE JOY of Christmas worn off a bit? The farther north we live, the colder are the days, and the higher the heating costs—along with credit-card bills coming due from holiday celebrations. Although Psalm 147 honors winter in poetic lines where Yahweh "gives snow like wool; scatters frost like ashes. God hurls down hail like crumbs" (verses 16-17). A better reading for this week may be from the Lord's Prayer: "Forgive us our debts."

Instead, our four readings from four different contexts brim with gratitude and praise. The prophet Jeremiah imagines the returning Jewish exiles singing "aloud on the height of Zion" (31:12). He even remembers "the blind and the lame, those with child and those in labor, together ... with consolations I will lead them back" (31:8-9).

Within these texts, however, are two opposing assumptions about the recipients of God's bounty. *Who* are they?

In Jeremiah 31, Yahweh has only "ransomed Jacob" and has "become a father to Israel, and Ephraim is my firstborn." Psalm

147 is even more exclusive: God "declares his word to Jacob, his statutes and ordinances to Israel. [God] has not dealt thus with any other nation" (verses 19-20).

But in John 1, the emphasis shifts. The eternal Word now embodied in flesh came to "what was his own, and his own people did not accept him" (verse 11). Only those who receive him as their own are given "power to become children of God" (12). From now on, having the right genealogy won't cut it.

When it comes to spiritual blessings, Ephesians 1 is truly lavish. We have "redemption" as God's own people, "forgiveness of sins," a great inheritance, and "the seal of the promised Holy Spirit." But this text does not clarify who "we" are. Not until Ephesians 2 do we find out that these blessings are also for non-Jews, originally "aliens from the commonwealth of Israel" (verse 12). The dividing wall between Jew and Gentile is now demolished. This Sunday, let's ponder not only God's generosity, but also changing attitudes about who receives it.

[JANUARY 11]

Water, Spirit, Power

Genesis 1:1-5; Psalm 29; Acts 19:1-7; Mark 1:4-11

THE WORDS "WATER, power, creativity, and Spirit" tie our four texts together. Narrative poetry in Genesis 1 portrays a dark, watery void upon which the Spirit of God moves to create light and our living earth. Psalm 29 magnifies this power: "the God of glory thunders, the Lord, over mighty waters" (verse 3)!

The readings from Mark 1 and Acts 19 focus on water used for baptism—and again the Spirit hovers over that water. John's baptism left quite an impact. Some years later and many miles away in Ephesus, Paul finds a dozen disciples who *only* know the baptism of John. When Paul re-baptizes them in the name of Jesus, the Holy Spirit comes upon them.

As our earliest gospel, Mark is quite clear that when John baptized Jesus, the Spirit descended on him to proclaim him God's beloved. Yet Mark also matter-of-factly states something that proves embarrassing for the growing Jesus Movement. John was proclaiming a "baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins" (1:4). Yet he never blinks an eye when Jesus comes to him to be baptized. Did Jesus also need to repent of sin?

The other three gospel authors squirm uncomfortably at this thought. In Matthew, John confronts Jesus with the dilemma, but Jesus responds ambiguously, "Let it be so now, for it is proper in this way to fulfill all righteousness" (Matthew 3:15). Luke repeats Mark's description of John's baptism as a sign of repentance and forgiveness (Luke 3:3), but later casually mentions that Jesus was baptized while praying, never mentioning John's role (3:21). In the fourth gospel, John affirms his role as baptizer, but does not name it as a symbol of repentance, nor does he baptize Jesus. When Jesus shows up, John names him as the Lamb of God who *takes away* sin (John 1:29)!

Since these retellings minimize Jesus' baptism as one of repentance, we can deduce that Mark's account is authentic. So deeply does the human Jesus identify with us.

[JANUARY 18]

Unexpected Appearances

1 Samuel 3:1-20; Psalm 139:1-6, 13-18;
1 Corinthians 6:12-20; John 1:43-51

JANUARY 6 WAS the feast of Epiphany, the 12th day of Christmas, which celebrates the visit of the magi “from the East.” Let’s take a moment on this second Sunday after Epiphany to define this Greek word we rarely use. The verb *epiphainō* simply means “to show oneself” or “to make an appearance.” The noun *epiphaneia* is “an appearing.” For members who rarely attend church, their presence on Christmas or Easter may truly be “an epiphany”!

In religious contexts, however, my Greek lexicon calls an epiphany “a visible manifestation of a hidden divinity, either in the form of a personal appearance, or by some deed of power.” To those Eastern astrologers that unusual star beckoning them to seek a new king in Judea was indeed an epiphany.

Two of our readings describe other divine epiphanies. Before Israel’s monarchy, the last and greatest judge over the people was Samuel. Yahweh had blessed Hannah, Samuel’s devout mother, with a son, whom she dedicated back to God. So as a young boy, Samuel lived with the old priest Eli at Shiloh, a sacred site in Samaria housing the Ark of the Covenant. But “the word of the Lord was rare in those days; visions were not widespread” (1 Samuel 3:1). One night Samuel heard a voice calling him. Thinking it was Eli, he went to him three times, until Eli finally realized this was a divine epiphany. Samuel responded to the Lord, who confirmed an oracle of judgment upon Eli’s wayward sons.

More than 1,000 years later, a Galilean Jew from the town of Bethsaida also had an unexpected epiphany. Inconsequential at first—the rabbi Jesus noticed Nathanael sitting under a fig tree. Yet an instant spiritual connection between these two resulted in a special revelation from Jesus: “You will see heaven opened and angels of God ascending and descending upon the Chosen One” (John 1:51), hearkening to the vision of Daniel (7:9-14). Do such epiphanies happen today? What’s your experience?

[JANUARY 25]

Preparing for a New Future

Jonah 3:1-5, 10; Psalm 62:5-12;
1 Corinthians 7:29-31; Mark 1:14-20

“THE FORM OF this world is passing away,” warns Paul in 1 Corinthians 7. So also insist environmental scientists, who warn of an unlivable planet unless we can control our carbon emissions. Today’s climate-deniers remind me of the people who jeered at Noah building a boat on dry land.

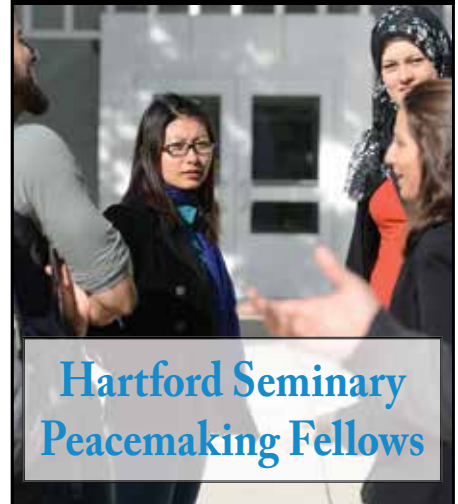
Although Noah’s story is not one of our readings, three other texts warn of radical changes to come. The reign of God—and thus the judgment of God—is imminent. Repent and prepare for a different future! For Mark and Paul, the coming of Messiah Jesus is good news; Jesus announces the arrival of God’s reign on earth (Mark 1:15). But this also demands repentance and lifestyle changes. Jesus’ call to Peter, Andrew, James, and John represents the radical vocational change that this response requires (Mark 1:16-20).

The Apostle Paul’s own vocation changed drastically as well, and he preaches the same message to believers in Corinth who were still enmeshed in “this world” behaviors. Verses 29-31 summarize Paul’s advice to believers in various nuanced ways as to how their lifestyles should change (or stay the same) regarding marriage, social status, or male circumcision. The admonition to “those who buy as if they had no possessions” especially challenges our current materialistic society.

But perhaps upright, law-abiding church people, identify most with the prophet Jonah’s dilemma. We struggle to live godly lives—and then what if our worst, nastiest enemies *do* repent? Can we handle God’s forgiveness of people we love to hate? Finally, Psalm 62 describes the rest that comes to those who have let go of the “passing form of this world.” The psalmist reminds, do not set your heart on high or low status because power and steadfast love belong to God (see verses 10-12). Wait, instead, for God alone. God alone is your rock and salvation. ■

“Preaching the Word,” Sojourners’ online resource for sermon preparation and Bible study, is available at sojo.net/ptw.

Building on its expertise in Islamic Studies and Christian-Muslim Relations and continuing the success of its breakthrough International Peacemaking Program, Hartford Seminary proudly announces



Hartford Seminary Peacemaking Fellows

A one-year, all-expenses-paid residential program of interfaith study and practice for young American Christian leaders seeking to work for peace among the religiously diverse communities of the United States. Funded by the Arthur Vining Davis Foundations, these Fellowships will be awarded through a competitive application process to two highly qualified and motivated applicants who are passionate about interfaith relations and peacemaking.

Scholarships include:

- Travel
- Housing
- Stipend
- Full tuition



Contact Dr. Jonathan B. Lee,
jlee@hartsem.edu, for more
information.

www.hartsem.edu



A Winter to Remember, Beforehand

AS WE BLITHELY head into what we assume will be another warm winter—given the effects of global warming denied only by the ExxonMobil wing of Congress—we would do well to heed the warning of the nation's oldest weather forecaster. According to the *Old Farmer's Almanac*, the coming winter will be particularly cold, with

The Old Farmer's Almanac never lies. (It guesses, but that's not lying.)

deep December snows to write home about, if you can get to the mailbox.

I first heard this forecast on the radio, driving home from another of the many craft festivals we attended this fall. We enjoy the talented local musicians and artisans, the copious amounts of free samples, and the chance I get at every handmade soap tent to complain that their cheese tastes funny. (I love doing that. It never gets old.)

The only drawback to fall festivals is the unavoidable encounter with dulcimer players. I listen politely for as long as I can stand it, then cry out, "Can you play 'Free Bird' on that thing?!" I do this to restore my sanity, if only for a moment. With its gentle, bell-like tones, dulcimer music is like a droning mosquito that you can't kill. (The main problem with a hammer dulcimer is the hammer is too small and not made of metal. And they don't hit it hard enough. I would hit it much harder.)

The dulcimer makers are proud of their craft, and offer them for sale, stacked together like so much firewood, dried and waiting for some conscientious humanitarian with a match to put an end to the madness.

But I digress.

GRANTED, IF BIG snows bring Washington to a standstill this winter, nobody would notice on Capitol Hill. But I wanted to be ready at home, with lots of supplies and plenty of rock salt for the sidewalks. (Winter tip: The best way to get a car out of deep snow is to place a dulcimer under each tire.)

I didn't have a copy of the *Old Farmer's Almanac* at home, so I took a chance that they might have a website, an unlikely possibility, I figured, like the Amish having iPads. I couldn't imagine a publication that hadn't changed its design since its first issue in 1792 would have joined the electronic age. But it had, and its website looks like it was designed in 1792. (Back then you couldn't click a link. You had to attach a harness.)

Like the distinctive yellow print edition, the website still has the simple and sometimes preposterous homespun remedies. (Yes, Vitamin D is probably good for colds, but what does the moon have to do with it?) It still has ancient recipes for griddle cakes and shoofly pie. (Is sorghum still a thing?) And in these troubled times, the *Almanac's* plain talk about all subjects is kind of refreshing.

To be honest, its weather forecasts are seldom accurate, and they

are the laughing stock of actual meteorologists. But when's the last time a meteorologist gave you a recipe for Creamy Pumpkin Pie?

These days, I go to the website for one thing: the live webcam of the parking lot in Dublin, New Hampshire. It's the *Almanac's* headquarters, and judging by the number of cars, they've got about a dozen employees, with at least one of them probably named Cletus.

A parking lot may not be the best metaphor for our times, but the ebb and flow of life can clearly be seen on this humble blacktop. Rush hour starts about 8:30, with the arrival of the first car. It gets kind of hectic around 9, with sometimes as many as three cars vying for the 20 remaining spaces. But then it calms down. By 5:30 it's empty again. Another pressure-cooker day at the *Old Farmer's Almanac* has come to a close.

If you can't watch the livecam all day—What, you have better things to do?—there are back-up screenshots taken hourly of the parking lot. And they're archived. I'm telling you this is one well-documented parking lot.

The street lights go on at 6 p.m., by the way, and sometimes the camera lens is blurred by raindrops, creating a flare effect that is aesthetically quite soothing. Which is why I can't stop watching it. It's like the gentle music of the dulcimer, without the desire to smash something. ■

Ed Spivey Jr. is art director of Sojourners.

Ken Davis



Thank You!

WE HERE AT SOJOURNERS are excited by all the work YOU helped us to accomplish in 2014!

Our work for peace and justice is only possible because of your generosity. Your donation goes directly to support our work to move faith in action for social justice in 2015 and beyond.

Give today. Visit **www.sojo.net/Give2014** or send your check to: Sojourners, P.O. Box 70730, Washington, DC 20024-0730.

sojourners
www.sojo.net

SUMMER 2015

Writing Programs at the Collegeville Institute

Writing for the Life of Faith



All workshops are located at the Collegeville Institute, Collegeville, Minnesota, on the campus of Saint John's University and Abbey, a Benedictine institution dedicated to the values of work, community, and prayer. All expenses, including travel, are covered by the Collegeville Institute.

A Broader Public

Writing for the Online Audience, with the Editors of Religion Dispatches

Entering the public conversation

Tuesday, June 9 – Monday, June 15

Writing to Change the World

A Week with Jonathan Wilson-Hartgrove

For those interested in writing for social change

Wednesday, June 17 – Tuesday, June 23

Women Writing

A Week with Lauren Winner

For women writing autobiographical, non-fiction prose

Sunday, June 28 – Saturday, July 4

Awakening Theological Imagination in the Congregation

A Spiritual Practice of Writing with Karen Hering

Helping pastors and religious educators cultivate personal attentiveness and invigorate theological conversation in their congregations

Monday, July 6 – Sunday, July 12

Poetry, Prose and Prayer

A Week with Michael Dennis Browne

For poets, novelists, and essayists exploring religious themes in their work

Tuesday, July 14 – Monday, July 20

Apart, and Yet a Part

Independent, unstructured work in community

Wednesday, July 22 – Tuesday, July 28

Words for Worship

A Liturgical Writing Workshop with Michael Joncas and Susan Briehl

For writers of liturgical prayers and/or hymn texts

Thursday, July 30 – Wednesday, August 5

Words that Sing I

A Week with Mary Nilsen

For religious professionals seeking to write more powerful, lyrical prose

Tuesday, August 11 – Sunday, August 16

For application information, and to learn more about our Resident Scholars program and short-term residencies, visit our website: www.collegevilleinstitute.org. Please visit our website for additional fall 2015 off-site workshop offerings.

 **Collegeville Institute**
exploring faith, igniting imagination, renewing community